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AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY

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AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY

AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY

BY

THEODORE DREISER

VOLUME ONE

NEW YORK
BONI AND LIVERIGHT
MCMXXV

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Printed in the United States of America

AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY

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BOOK ONE

AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY

BOOK ONE

CHAPTER I

DUSK—of a summer night.

And the tall walls of the commercial heart of an American city of perhaps 400,000 inhabitants—such walls as in time may linger as a mere fable.

And up the broad street, now comparatively hushed, a little band of six,—a man of about fifty, short, stout, with bushy hair protruding from under a round black felt hat, a most unimportant-looking person, who carried a small portable organ such as is customarily used by street preachers and singers. And with him a woman perhaps five years his junior, taller, not so broad, but solid of frame and vigorous, very plain in face and dress, and yet not homely, leading with one hand a small boy of seven and in the other carrying a Bible and several hymn books. With these three, but walking independently behind, was a girl of fifteen, a boy of twelve and another girl of nine, all following obediently, but not too enthusiastically, in the wake of the others.

It was hot, yet with a sweet languor about it all.

Crossing at right angles the great thoroughfare on which they walked, was a second canyon-like way, threaded by throngs and vehicles and various lines of cars which clanged their bells and made such progress as they might amid swiftly moving streams of traffic. Yet the little group seemed unconscious of anything save a set purpose to make its way between the contending lines of traffic and pedestrians which flowed by them.

Having reached an intersection this side of the second principal thoroughfare—really just an alley between two tall structures—now quite bare of life of any kind, the man put down the organ, which the woman immediately opened, setting up a music rack upon which she placed a wide flat hymn book. Then handing the Bible to the man, she fell back in line with him,

while the twelve-year-old boy put down a small camp-stool in front of the organ. The man—the father, as he chanced to be—looked about him with seeming wide-eyed assurance, and announced, without appearing to care whether he had any auditors or not:

"We will first sing a hymn of praise, so that any who may wish to acknowledge the Lord may join us. Will you oblige, Hester?"

At this the eldest girl, who until now had attempted to appear as unconscious and unaffected as possible, bestowed her rather slim and as yet undeveloped figure upon the camp chair and turned the leaves of the hymn book, pumping the organ while her mother observed:

"I should think it might be nice to sing twenty-seven to-night—'How Sweet the Balm of Jesus' Love.'"

By this time various homeward-bound individuals of diverse grades and walks of life, noticing the small group disposing itself in this fashion, hesitated for a moment to eye them askance or paused to ascertain the character of their work. This hesitancy, construed by the man apparently to constitute attention, however mobile, was seized upon by him and he began addressing them as though they were specifically here to hear him.

"Let us all sing twenty-seven, then—'How Sweet the Balm of Jesus' Love.'"

At this the young girl began to interpret the melody upon the organ, emitting a thin though correct strain, at the same time joining her rather high soprano with that of her mother, together with the rather dubious baritone of the father. The other children piped weakly along, the boy and girl having taken hymn books from the small pile stacked upon the organ. As they sang, this nondescript and indifferent street audience gazed, held by the peculiarity of such an unimportant-looking family publicly raising its collective voice against the vast skepticism and apathy of life. Some were interested or moved sympathetically by the rather tame and inadequate figure of the girl at the organ, others by the impractical and materially inefficient texture of the father, whose weak blue eyes and rather flabby but poorly-clothed figure bespoke more of failure than anything else. Of the group the mother alone stood out as having that force and determination which, however blind or erroneous, makes for self-preservation, if not success in life. She, more than any of the others, stood up with an ignorant, yet somehow respectable air of conviction. If you had watched her, her

hymn book dropped to her side, her glance directed straight before her into space, you would have said: "Well, here is one who, whatever her defects, probably does what she believes as nearly as possible." A kind of hard, fighting faith in the wisdom and mercy of that definite overruling and watchful power which she proclaimed, was written in her every feature and gesture.

"The love of Jesus saves me whole,
The love of God my steps control,"

she sang resonantly, if slightly nasally, between the towering walls of the adjacent buildings.

The boy moved restlessly from one foot to the other, keeping his eyes down, and for the most part only half singing. A tall and as yet slight figure, surmounted by an interesting head and face—white skin, dark hair—he seemed more keenly observant and decidedly more sensitive than most of the others—appeared indeed to resent and even to suffer from the position in which he found himself. Plainly pagan rather than religious, life interested him, although as yet he was not fully aware of this. All that could be truly said of him now was that there was no definite appeal in all this for him. He was too young, his mind much too responsive to phases of beauty and pleasure which had little, if anything, to do with the remote and cloudy romance which swayed the minds of his mother and father.

Indeed the home life of which this boy found himself a part and the various contacts, material and psychic, which thus far had been his, did not tend to convince him of the reality and force of all that his mother and father seemed so certainly to believe and say. Rather, they seemed more or less troubled in their lives, at least materially. His father was always reading the Bible and speaking in meeting at different places, especially in the "mission," which he and his mother conducted not so far from this corner. At the same time, as he understood it, they collected money from various interested or charitably inclined business men here and there who appeared to believe in such philanthropic work. Yet the family was always "hard up," never very well clothed, and deprived of many comforts and pleasures which seemed common enough to others. And his father and mother were constantly proclaiming the love and mercy and care of God for him and for all. Plainly there was something wrong somewhere. He could not get it all straight, but still he could not help respecting his mother, a woman whose force and earnest-

ness, as well as her sweetness, appealed to him. Despite much mission work and family cares, she managed to be fairly cheerful, or at least sustaining, often declaring most emphatically "God will provide" or "God will show the way," especially in times of too great stress about food or clothes. Yet apparently, in spite of this, as he and all the other children could see, God did not show any very clear way, even though there was always an extreme necessity for His favorable intervention in their affairs.

To-night, walking up the great street with his sisters and brother, he wished that they need not do this any more, or at least that he need not be a part of it. Other boys did not do such things, and besides, somehow it seemed shabby and even degrading. On more than one occasion, before he had been taken on the street in this fashion, other boys had called to him and made fun of his father, because he was always publicly emphasizing his religious beliefs or convictions. Thus in one neighborhood in which they had lived, when he was but a child of seven, his father, having always preluded every conversation with "Praise the Lord," he heard boys call "Here comes old Praise-the-Lord Griffiths." Or they would call out after him "Hey, you're the fellow whose sister plays the organ. Is there anything else she can play?"

"What does he always want to go around saying, 'Praise the Lord' for? Other people don't do it."

It was that old mass yearning for a likeness in all things that troubled them, and him. Neither his father nor his mother was like other people, because they were always making so much of religion, and now at last they were making a business of it.

On this night in this great street with its cars and crowds and tall buildings, he felt ashamed, dragged out of normal life, to be made a show and jest of. The handsome automobiles that sped by, the loitering pedestrians moving off to what interests and comforts he could only surmise; the gay pairs of young people, laughing and jesting and the "kids" staring, all troubled him with a sense of something different, better, more beautiful than his, or rather their life.

And now units of this vagrom and unstable street throng, which was forever shifting and changing about them, seemed to sense the psychologic error of all this in so far as these children were concerned, for they would nudge one another, the more sophisticated and indifferent lifting an eyebrow and smiling contemptuously, the more sympathetic or experienced commenting on the useless presence of these children.

"I see these people around here nearly every night now—two or three times a week, anyhow," this from a young clerk who had just met his girl and was escorting her toward a restaurant. "They're just working some religious dodge or other, I guess."

"That oldest boy don't wanta be here. He feels outa place, I can see that. It ain't right to make a kid like that come out unless he wants to. He can't understand all this stuff, anyhow." This from an idler and loafer of about forty, one of those odd hangers-on about the commercial heart of a city, addressing a pausing and seemingly amiable stranger.

"Yeh, I guess that's so," the other assented, taking in the peculiar cast of the boy's head and face. In view of the uneasy and self-conscious expression upon the face whenever it was lifted, one might have intelligently suggested that it was a little unkind as well as idle to thus publicly force upon a temperament as yet unfitted to absorb their import, religious and psychic services best suited to reflective temperaments of maturer years.

Yet so it was.

As for the remainder of the family, both the youngest girl and boy were too small to really understand much of what it was all about or to care. The eldest girl at the organ appeared not so much to mind, as to enjoy the attention and comment her presence and singing evoked, for more than once, not only strangers, but her mother and father, had assured her that she had an appealing and compelling voice, which was only partially true. It was not a good voice. They did not really understand music. Physically, she was of a pale, emasculate and unimportant structure, with no real mental force or depth, and was easily made to feel that this was an excellent field in which to distinguish herself and attract a little attention. As for the parents, they were determined upon spiritualizing the world as much as possible, and, once the hymn was concluded, the father launched into one of those hackneyed descriptions of the delights of a release, via self-realization of the mercy of God and the love of Christ and the will of God toward sinners, from the burdensome cares of an evil conscience.

"All men are sinners in the light of the Lord," he declared. "Unless they repent, unless they accept Christ, His love and forgiveness of them, they can never know the happiness of being spiritually whole and clean. Oh, my friends! If you could but know the peace and content that comes with the knowledge, the inward understanding, that Christ lived and died for you and that He walks with you every day and hour, by light and by dark, at dawn and at dusk, to keep and strengthen you for the

tasks and cares of the world that are ever before you. Oh, the snares and pitfalls that beset us all! And then the soothing realization that Christ is ever with us, to counsel, to aid, to hearten, to bind up our wounds and make us whole! Oh, the peace, the satisfaction, the comfort, the glory of that!"

"Amen!" asseverated his wife, and the daughter, Hester, or Esta, as she was called by the family, moved by the need of as much public support as possible for all of them—echoed it after her.

Clyde, the eldest boy, and the two younger children merely gazed at the ground, or occasionally at their father, with a feeling that possibly it was all true and important, yet somehow not as significant or inviting as some of the other things which life held. They heard so much of this, and to their young and eager minds life was made for something more than street and mission hall protestations of this sort.

Finally, after a second hymn and an address by Mrs. Griffiths, during which she took occasion to refer to the mission work jointly conducted by them in a near-by street, and their services to the cause of Christ in general, a third hymn was indulged in, and then some tracts describing the mission rescue work being distributed, such voluntary gifts as were forthcoming were taken up by Asa—the father. The small organ was closed, the camp chair folded up and given to Clyde, the Bible and hymn books picked up by Mrs. Griffiths, and with the organ supported by a leather strap passed over the shoulder of Griffiths, senior, the missionward march was taken up.

During all this time Clyde was saying to himself that he did not wish to do this any more, that he and his parents looked foolish and less than normal—"cheap" was the word he would have used if he could have brought himself to express his full measure of resentment at being compelled to participate in this way—and that he would not do it any more if he could help. What good did it do them to have him along? His life should not be like this. Other boys did not have to do as he did. He meditated now more determinedly than ever a rebellion by which he would rid himself of the need of going out in this way. Let his elder sister go if she chose; she liked it. His younger sister and brother might be too young to care. But he——

"They seemed a little more attentive than usual to-night, I thought," commented Griffiths to his wife as they walked along, the seductive quality of the summer evening air softening him into a more generous interpretation of the customary indifferent spirit of the passer-by.

"Yes; twenty-seven took tracts to-night as against eighteen on Thursday."

"The love of Christ must eventually prevail," comforted the father, as much to hearten himself as his wife. "The pleasures and cares of the world hold a very great many, but when sorrow overtakes them, then some of these seeds will take root."

"I am sure of it. That is the thought which always keeps me up. Sorrow and the weight of sin eventually bring some of them to see the error of their way."

They now entered into the narrow side street from which they had emerged, and walking as many as a dozen doors from the corner, entered the door of a yellow single-story wooden building, the large window and the two glass panes in the central door of which had been painted a gray-white. Across both windows and the smaller panels in the double door had been painted: "The Door of Hope. Bethel Independent Mission. Meetings Every Wednesday and Saturday night, 8 to 10. Sundays at 11, 3 and 8. Everybody Welcome." Under this legend on each window were printed the words: "God is Love," and below this again, in smaller type: "How Long Since You Wrote to Mother?"

The small company entered the yellow unprepossessing door and disappeared.

CHAPTER II

THAT such a family, thus cursorily presented, might have a different and somewhat peculiar history could well be anticipated, and it would be true. Indeed, this one presented one of those anomalies of psychic and social reflex and motivation such as would tax the skill of not only the psychologist but the chemist and physicist as well, to unravel. To begin with, Asa Griffiths, the father, was one of those poorly integrated and correlated organisms, the product of an environment and a religious theory, but with no guiding or mental insight of his own, yet sensitive and therefore highly emotional, and without any practical sense whatsoever. Indeed it would be hard to make clear just how life appealed to him, or what the true hue of his emotional responses was. On the other hand, as has been indicated, his wife was of a firmer texture but with scarcely any truer or more practical insight into anything.

The history of this man and his wife is of no particular interest here save as it affected their boy of twelve, Clyde Griffiths. This youth, aside from a certain emotionalism and exotic sense of romance which characterized him, and which he took more from his father than from his mother, brought a more vivid and intelligent imagination to things, and was constantly thinking of how he might better himself, if he had a chance; places to which he might go, things he might see, and how differently he might live, if only this, that and the other thing were true. The principal thing that troubled Clyde up to his fifteenth year, and for long after in retrospect, was that the calling or profession of his parents was the shabby thing that it appeared to be in the eyes of others. For so often throughout his youth in different cities in which his parents had conducted a mission or spoken on the streets—Grand Rapids, Detroit, Milwaukee, Chicago, lastly Kansas City—it had been obvious that people, at least the boys and girls he encountered, looked down upon him and his brothers and sisters for being the children of such parents. On several occasions, and much against the mood of his parents, who never countenanced such exhibitions of temper, he had stopped to fight with one or another of these boys. But always, beaten or victorious, he had been made conscious of the fact that the work his parents did was not satisfactory to others,—shabby, trivial.

And always he was thinking of what he would do, once he reached the place where he could get away.

For Clyde's parents had proved impractical in the matter of the future of their children. They did not understand the importance or the essential necessity for some form of practical or professional training for each and every one of their young ones. Instead, being wrapped up in the notion of evangelizing the world, they had neglected to keep their children in school in any one place. They had moved here and there, sometimes in the very midst of an advantageous school season, because of a larger and better religious field in which to work. And there were times when, the work proving highly unprofitable and Asa being unable to make much money at the two things he most understood—gardening and canvassing for one invention or another—they were quite without sufficient food or decent clothes, and the children could not go to school. In the face of such situations as these, whatever the children might think, Asa and his wife remained as optimistic as ever, or they insisted to themselves that they were, and had unwavering faith in the Lord and His intention to provide.

The combination home and mission which this family occupied was dreary enough in most of its phases to discourage the average youth or girl of any spirit. It consisted in its entirety of one long store floor in an old and decidedly colorless and inartistic wooden building which was situated in that part of Kansas City which lies north of Independence Boulevard and west of Troost Avenue, the exact street or place being called Bickel, a very short thoroughfare opening off Missouri Avenue, a somewhat more lengthy but no less nondescript highway. And the entire neighborhood in which it stood was very faintly and yet not agreeably redolent of a commercial life which had long since moved farther south, if not west. It was some five blocks from the spot on which twice a week the open air meetings of these religious enthusiasts and proselytizers were held.

And it was the ground floor of this building, looking out into Bickel Street at the front and some dreary back yards of equally dreary frame houses, which was divided at the front into a hall forty by twenty-five feet in size, in which had been placed some sixty collapsible wood chairs, a lectern, a map of Palestine or the Holy Land, and for wall decorations some twenty-five printed but unframed mottoes which read, in part:

"WINE IS A MOCKER, STRONG DRINK IS RAGING AND WHOSOEVER IS DECEIVED THEREBY IS NOT WISE."

"Take Hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for mine help." Psalms 35:2.

"And ye, my flock, the flock of my pasture, *are men,* and I am your God, saith the Lord God." Ezekiel 34:31.

"O God, thou knowest my foolishness, and my sins are not hid from Thee." Psalms 69:5.

"If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall move; and nothing shall be impossible unto you." Matthew 17:20.

"For the day of the Lord is near." Obadiah 15.

"For there shall be no reward to the evil man." Proverbs 24:20.

"Look, then, not upon the wine when it is red: it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder." Proverbs 23:31, 32.

These mighty adjurations were as silver and gold plates set in a wall of dross.

The rear forty feet of this very commonplace floor was intricately and yet neatly divided into three small bedrooms, a living room which overlooked the backyard and wooden fences of yards no better than those at the back; also, a combination kitchen and dining room exactly ten feet square, and a store room for mission tracts, hymnals, boxes, trunks and whatever else of non-immediate use, but of assumed value, which the family owned. This particular small room lay immediately to the rear of the mission hall itself, and into it before or after speaking or at such times as a conference seemed important, both Mr. and Mrs. Griffiths were wont to retire—also at times to meditate or pray.

How often had Clyde and his sisters and younger brother seen his mother or father, or both, in conference with some derelict or semi-repentant soul who had come for advice or aid, most usually for aid. And here at times, when his mother's and father's financial difficulties were greatest, they were to be found thinking, or as Asa Griffiths was wont helplessly to say at times, "praying their way out," a rather ineffectual way, as Clyde began to think later.

And the whole neighborhood was so dreary and run-down that he hated the thought of living in it, let alone being part of a work that required constant appeals for aid, as well as constant prayer and thanksgiving to sustain it.

Mrs. Elvira Griffiths before she had married Asa had been nothing but an ignorant farm girl, brought up without much thought of religion of any kind. But having fallen in love with him, she had become inoculated with the virus of Evangelism and proselytizing which dominated him, and had followed him gladly and enthusiastically in all of his ventures and through all of his vagaries. Being rather flattered by the knowledge that she could speak and sing, her ability to sway and persuade and control people with the "word of God," as she saw it, she had become more or less pleased with herself on this account and so persuaded to continue.

Occasionally a small band of people followed the preachers to their mission, or learning of its existence through their street work, appeared there later—those odd and mentally disturbed or distrait souls who are to be found in every place. And it had been Clyde's compulsory duty throughout the years when he could not act for himself to be in attendance at these various meetings. And always he had been more irritated than favorably influenced by the types of men and women who came here—mostly men—down-and-out laborers, loafers, drunkards, wastrels, the botched and helpless who seemed to drift in, because they had no other place to go. And they were always testifying as to how God or Christ or Divine Grace had rescued them from this or that predicament—never how they had rescued any one else. And always his father and mother were saying "Amen" and "Glory to God," and singing hymns and afterward taking up a collection for the legitimate expenses of the hall—collections which, as he surmised, were little enough—barely enough to keep the various missions they had conducted in existence.

The one thing that really interested him in connection with his parents was the existence somewhere in the east—in a small city called Lycurgus, near Utica he understood—of an uncle, a brother of his father's, who was plainly different from all this. That uncle—Samuel Griffiths by name—was rich. In one way and another, from casual remarks dropped by his parents, Clyde had heard references to certain things this particular uncle might do for a person, if he but would; references to the fact that he was a shrewd, hard business man; that he had a great house and a large factory in Lycurgus for the manufacture of collars and shirts, which employed not less than three hundred

people; that he had a son who must be about Clyde's age, and several daughters, two at least, all of whom must be, as Clyde imagined, living in luxury in Lycurgus. News of all this had apparently been brought west in some way by people who knew Asa and his father and brother. As Clyde pictured this uncle, he must be a kind of Crœsus, living in ease and luxury there in the east, while here in the west—Kansas City—he and his parents and his brother and sisters were living in the same wretched and hum-drum, hand-to-mouth state that had always characterized their lives.

But for this—apart from anything he might do for himself, as he early began to see—there was no remedy. For at fifteen, and even a little earlier, Clyde began to understand that his education, as well as his sisters' and brother's, had been sadly neglected. And it would be rather hard for him to overcome this handicap, seeing that other boys and girls with more money and better homes were being trained for special kinds of work. How was one to get a start under such circumstances? Already when, at the age of thirteen, fourteen and fifteen, he began looking in the papers, which, being too worldly, had never been admitted to his home, he found that mostly skilled help was wanted, or boys to learn trades in which at the moment he was not very much interested. For true to the standard of the American youth, or the general American attitude toward life, he felt himself above the type of labor which was purely manual. What! Run a machine, lay bricks, learn to be a carpenter, or a plasterer, or a plumber, when boys no better than himself were clerks and druggists' assistants and bookkeepers and assistants in banks and real estate offices and such! Wasn't it menial, as miserable as the life he had thus far been leading, to wear old clothes and get up so early in the morning and do all the commonplace things such people had to do?

For Clyde was as vain and proud as he was poor. He was one of those interesting individuals who looked upon himself as a thing apart—never quite wholly and indissolubly merged with the family of which he was a member, and never with any profound obligations to those who had been responsible for his coming into the world. On the contrary, he was inclined to study his parents, not too sharply or bitterly, but with a very fair grasp of their qualities and capabilities. And yet, with so much judgment in that direction, he was never quite able—at least not until he had reached his sixteenth year—to formulate any policy in regard to himself, and then only in a rather fumbling and tentative way.

Incidentally by that time the sex lure or appeal had begun to manifest itself and he was already intensely interested and troubled by the beauty of the opposite sex, its attractions for him and his attraction for it. And, naturally and coincidentally, the matter of his clothes and his physical appearance had begun to trouble him not a little—how he looked and how other boys looked. It was painful to him now to think that his clothes were not right; that he was not as handsome as he might be, not as interesting. What a wretched thing it was to be born poor and not to have any one to do anything for you and not to be able to do so very much for yourself!

Casual examination of himself in mirrors whenever he found them tended rather to assure him that he was not so bad-looking —a straight, well-cut nose, high white forehead, wavy, glossy, black hair, eyes that were black and rather melancholy at times. And yet the fact that his family was the unhappy thing that it was, that he had never had any real friends, and could not have any, as he saw it, because of the work and connection of his parents, was now tending more and more to induce a kind of mental depression or melancholia which promised not so well for his future. It served to make him rebellious and hence lethargic at times. Because of his parents, and in spite of his looks, which were really agreeable and more appealing than most, he was inclined to misinterpret the interested looks which were cast at him occasionally by young girls in very different walks of life from him—the contemptuous and yet rather inviting way in which they looked to see if he were interested or disinterested, brave or cowardly.

And yet, before he had ever earned any money at all, he had always told himself that if only he had a better collar, a nicer shirt, finer shoes, a good suit, a swell overcoat like some boys had! Oh, the fine clothes, the handsome homes, the watches, rings, pins that some boys sported; the dandies many youths of his years already were! Some parents of boys of his years actually gave them cars of their own to ride in. They were to be seen upon the principal streets of Kansas City flitting to and fro like flies. And pretty girls with them. And he had nothing. And he never had had.

And yet the world was so full of so many things to do—so many people were so happy and so successful. What was he to do? Which way to turn? What one thing to take up and master—something that would get him somewhere. He could not say. He did not know exactly. And these peculiar parents were in no way sufficiently equipped to advise him.

CHAPTER III

ONE of the things that served to darken Clyde's mood just about the time when he was seeking some practical solution for himself, to say nothing of its profoundly disheartening effect on the Griffiths family as a whole, was the fact that his sister Esta, in whom he took no little interest (although they really had very little in common), ran away from home with an actor who happened to be playing in Kansas City and who took a passing fancy for her.

The truth in regard to Esta was that in spite of her guarded up-bringing, and the seeming religious and moral fervor which at times appeared to characterize her, she was just a sensuous, weak girl who did not by any means know yet what she thought. Despite the atmosphere in which she moved, essentially she was not of it. Like the large majority of those who profess and daily repeat the dogmas and creeds of the world, she had come into her practices and imagined attitude so insensibly from her earliest childhood on, that up to this time, and even later, she did not know the meaning of it all. For the necessity of thought had been obviated by advice and law, or "revealed" truth, and so long as other theories or situations and impulses of an external, or even internal, character did not arise to clash with these, she was safe enough. Once they did, however, it was a foregone conclusion that her religious notions, not being grounded on any conviction or temperamental bias of her own, were not likely to withstand the shock. So that all the while, and not unlike her brother Clyde, her thoughts as well as her emotions were wandering here and there—to love, to comfort—to things which in the main had little, if anything, to do with any self-abnegating and self-immolating religious theory. Within her was a chemism of dreams which somehow counteracted all they had to say.

Yet she had neither Clyde's force, nor, on the other hand, his resistance. She was in the main a drifter, with a vague yearning toward pretty dresses, hats, shoes, ribbons and the like, and superimposed above this, the religious theory or notion that she should not be. There were the long bright streets of a morning and afternoon after school or of an evening. The charm of certain girls swinging along together, arms locked, secrets a-whispering,

or that of boys, clownish, yet revealing through their bounding ridiculous animality the force and meaning of that chemistry and urge toward mating which lies back of all youthful thought and action. And in herself, as from time to time she observed lovers or flirtation-seekers who lingered at street corners or about doorways, and who looked at her in a longing and seeking way, there was a stirring, a nerve plasm palpitation that spoke loudly for all the seemingly material things of life, not for the thin pleasantries of heaven.

And the glances drilled her like an invisible ray, for she was pleasing to look at and was growing more attractive hourly. And the moods in others awakened responsive moods in her, those rearranging chemisms upon which all the morality or immorality of the world is based.

And then one day, as she was coming home from school, a youth of that plausible variety known as "masher" engaged her in conversation, largely because of a look and a mood which seemed to invite it. And there was little to stay her, for she was essentially yielding, if not amorous. Yet so great had been her home drilling as to the need of modesty, circumspection, purity and the like, that on this occasion at least there was no danger of any immediate lapse. Only this attack once made, others followed, were accepted, or not so quickly fled from, and by degrees, these served to break down that wall of reserve which her home training had served to erect. She became secretive and hid her ways from her parents.

Youths occasionally walked and talked with her in spite of herself. They demolished that excessive shyness which had been hers, and which had served to put others aside for a time at least. She wished for other contacts—dreamed of some bright, gay, wonderful love of some kind, with some one.

Finally, after a slow but vigorous internal growth of mood and desire, there came this actor, one of those vain, handsome, animal personalities, all clothes and airs, but no morals (no taste, no courtesy or real tenderness even), but of compelling magnetism, who was able within the space of one brief week and a few meetings to completely befuddle and enmesh her so that she was really his to do with as he wished. And the truth was that he scarcely cared for her at all. To him, dull as he was, she was just another girl—fairly pretty, obviously sensuous and inexperienced, a silly who could be taken by a few soft words—a show of seemingly sincere affection, talk of the opportunity of a broader, freer life on the road, in other great cities, as his wife.

And yet his words were those of a lover who would be true forever. All she had to do, as he explained to her, was to come away with him and be his bride, at once—now. Delay was so vain when two such as they had met. There was difficulty about marriage here, which he could not explain—it related to friends—but in St. Louis he had a preacher friend who would wed them. She was to have new and better clothes than she had ever known, delicious adventures, love. She would travel with him and see the great world. She would never need to trouble more about anything save him; and while it was truth to her—the verbal surety of a genuine passion—to him it was the most ancient and serviceable type of blarney, often used before and often successful.

In a single week then, at odd hours, morning, afternoon and night, this chemic witchery was accomplished.

Coming home rather late one Saturday night in April from a walk which he had taken about the business heart, in order to escape the regular Saturday night mission services, Clyde found his mother and father worried about the whereabouts of Esta. She had played and sung as usual at this meeting. And all had seemed all right with her. After the meeting she had gone to her room, saying that she was not feeling very well and was going to bed early. But by eleven o'clock, when Clyde returned, her mother had chanced to look into her room and discovered that she was not there nor anywhere about the place. A certain bareness in connection with the room—some trinkets and dresses removed, an old and familiar suitcase gone—had first attracted her mother's attention. Then the house search proving that she was not there, Asa had gone outside to look up and down the street. She sometimes walked out alone, or sat or stood in front of the mission during its idle or closed hours.

This search revealing nothing, Clyde and he had walked to a corner, then along Missouri Avenue. No Esta. At twelve they returned and after that, naturally, the curiosity in regard to her grew momentarily sharper.

At first they assumed that she might have taken an unexplained walk somewhere, but as twelve-thirty, and finally one, and one-thirty, passed and no Esta, they were about to notify the police, when Clyde, going into her room, saw a note pinned to the pillow of her small wooden bed—a missive that had escaped the eye of his mother. At once he went to it, curious and comprehending, for he had often wondered in what way, assuming that he ever wished to depart surreptitiously, he would notify his parents, for he knew they would never countenance his departure unless they

were permitted to supervise it in every detail. And now here was Esta missing, and here was undoubtedly some such communication as he might have left. He picked it up, eager to read it, but at that moment his mother came into the room and, seeing it in his hand, exclaimed: "What's that? A note? Is it from her?" He surrendered it and she unfolded it, reading it quickly. He noted that her strong broad face, always tanned a reddish brown, blanched as she turned away toward the outer room. Her biggish mouth was now set in a firm, straight line. Her large, strong hand shook the least bit as it held the small note aloft.

"Asa!" she called, and then tramping into the next room where he was, his frizzled grayish hair curling distractedly above his round head, she said: "Read this."

Clyde, who had followed, saw him take it a little nervously in his pudgy hand, his lips, always weak and beginning to crinkle at the center with age, now working curiously. Any one who had known his life's history would have said it was the expression, slightly emphasized, with which he had received most of the untoward blows of his life in the past.

"Tst! Tst! Tst!" was the only sound he made at first, a sucking sound of the tongue and palate—most weak and inadequate, it seemed to Clyde. Next there was another "Tst! Tst! Tst!", his head beginning to shake from side to side. Then, "Now, what do you suppose could have caused her to do that?" Then he turned and gazed at his wife, who gazed blankly in return. Then, walking to and fro, his hands behind him, his short legs taking unconscious and queerly long steps, his head moving again, he gave vent to another ineffectual "Tst! Tst! Tst!"

Always the more impressive, Mrs. Griffiths now showed herself markedly different and more vital in this trying situation, a kind of irritation or dissatisfaction with life itself, along with an obvious physical distress, seeming to pass through her like a visible shadow. Once her husband had gotten up, she reached out and took the note, then merely glared at it again, her face set in hard yet stricken and disturbing lines. Her manner was that of one who is intensely disquieted and dissatisfied, one who fingers savagely at a material knot and yet cannot undo it, one who seeks restraint and freedom from complaint and yet who would complain bitterly, angrily. For behind her were all those years of religious work and faith, which somehow, in her poorly integrated conscience, seemed dimly to indicate that she should justly have been spared this. Where was her

God, her Christ, at this hour when this obvious evil was being done? Why had He not acted for her? How was He to explain this? His Biblical promises! His perpetual guidance! His declared mercies!

In the face of so great a calamity, it was very hard for her, as Clyde could see, to get this straightened out, instantly at least. Although, as Clyde had come to know, it could be done eventually, of course. For in some blind, dualistic way both she and Asa insisted, as do all religionists, in disassociating God from harm and error and misery, while granting Him nevertheless supreme control. They would seek for something else—some malign, treacherous, deceiving power which, in the face of God's omniscience and omnipotence, still beguiles and betrays—and find it eventually in the error and perverseness of the human heart, which God has made, yet which He does not control, because He does not want to control it.

At the moment, however, only hurt and rage were with her, and yet her lips did not twitch as did Asa's, nor did her eyes show that profound distress which filled his. Instead she retreated a step and reëxamined the letter, almost angrily, then said to Asa: "She's run away with some one and she doesn't say——" Then she stopped suddenly, remembering the presence of the children—Clyde, Julia, and Frank, all present and all gazing curiously, intently, unbelievingly. "Come in here," she called to her husband, "I want to talk to you a minute. You children had better go on to bed. We'll be out in a minute."

With Asa then she retired quite precipitately to a small room back of the mission hall. They heard her click the electric bulb. Then their voices were heard in low converse, while Clyde and Julia and Frank looked at each other, although Frank, being so young—only ten—could scarcely be said to have comprehended fully. Even Julia hardly gathered the full import of it. But Clyde, because of his larger contact with life and his mother's statement ("She's run away with some one"), understood well enough. Esta had tired of all this, as had he. Perhaps there was some one, like one of those dandies whom he saw on the streets with the prettiest girls, with whom she had gone. But where? And what was he like? That note told something, and yet his mother had not let him see it. She had taken it away too quickly. If only he had looked first, silently and to himself!

"Do you suppose she's run away for good?" he asked Julia dubiously, the while his parents were out of the room, Julia herself looking so blank and strange.

"How should I know?" she replied a little irritably, troubled by her parents' distress and this secretiveness, as well as Esta's action. "She never said anything to me. I should think she'd be ashamed of herself if she has."

Julia, being colder emotionally than either Esta or Clyde, was more considerate of her parents in a conventional way, and hence sorrier. True, she did not quite gather what it meant, but she suspected something, for she had talked occasionally with girls, but in a very guarded and conservative way. Now, however, it was more the way in which Esta had chosen to leave, deserting her parents and her brothers and herself, that caused her to be angry with her, for why should she go and do anything which would distress her parents in this dreadful fashion. It was dreadful. The air was thick with misery.

And as his parents talked in their little room, Clyde brooded too, for he was intensely curious about life now. What was it Esta had really done? Was it, as he feared and thought, one of those dreadful runaway or sexually disagreeable affairs which the boys on the streets and at school were always slyly talking about? How shameful, if that were true! She might never come back. She had gone with some man. There was something wrong about that, no doubt, for a girl, anyhow, for all he had ever heard was that all decent contacts between boys and girls, men and women, led to but one thing—marriage. And now Esta, in addition to their other troubles, had gone and done this. Certainly this home life of theirs was pretty dark now, and it would be darker instead of brighter because of this.

Presently the parents came out, and then Mrs. Griffiths' face, if still set and constrained, was somehow a little different, less savage perhaps, more hopelessly resigned.

"Esta's seen fit to leave us, for a little while, anyhow," was all she said at first, seeing the children waiting curiously. "Now, you're not to worry about her at all, or think any more about it. She'll come back after a while, I'm sure. She has chosen to go her own way, for a time, for some reason. The Lord's will be done." ("Blessed be the name of the Lord!" interpolated Asa.) "I thought she was happy here with us, but apparently she wasn't. She must see something of the world for herself, I suppose." (Here Asa put in another Tst! Tst! Tst!) "But we mustn't harbor hard thoughts. That won't do any good now—only thoughts of love and kindness." Yet she said this with a kind of sternness that somehow belied it—a click of the voice, as it were. "We can only hope that she will soon see how foolish she has been, and unthinking, and come back.

She can't prosper on the course she's going now. It isn't the Lord's way or will. She's too young and she's made a mistake. But we can forgive her. We must. Our hearts must be kept open, soft and tender." She talked as though she were addressing a meeting, but with a hard, sad, frozen face and voice. "Now, all of you go to bed. We can only pray now, and hope, morning, noon and night, that no evil will befall her. I wish she hadn't done that," she added, quite out of keeping with the rest of her statement and really not thinking of the children as present at all—just of Esta.

But Asa!

Such a father, as Clyde often thought, afterwards.

Apart from his own misery, he seemed only to note and be impressed by the more significant misery of his wife. During all this, he had stood foolishly to one side—short, gray, frizzled, inadequate.

"Well, blessed be the name of the Lord," he interpolated from time to time. "We must keep our hearts open. Yes, we mustn't judge. We must only hope for the best. Yes, yes! Praise the Lord—we must praise the Lord! Amen! Oh, yes! Tst! Tst! Tst!"

"If any one asks where she is," continued Mrs. Griffiths after a time, quite ignoring her spouse and addressing the children, who had drawn near her, "we will say that she has gone on a visit to some of my relatives back in Tonawanda. That won't be the truth, exactly, but then we don't know where she is or what the truth is—and she may come back. So we must not say or do anything that will injure her until we know."

"Yes, praise the Lord!" called Asa, feebly.

"So if any one should inquire at any time, until we know, we will say that."

"Sure," put in Clyde, helpfully, and Julia added, "All right."

Mrs. Griffiths paused and looked firmly and yet apologetically at her children. Asa, for his part, emitted another "Tst! Tst! Tst!" and then the children were waved to bed.

At that, Clyde, who really wanted to know what Esta's letter had said, but was convinced from long experience that his mother would not let him know unless she chose, returned to his room again, for he was tired. Why didn't they search more if there was hope of finding her? Where was she now—at this minute? On some train somewhere? Evidently she didn't want to be found. She was probably dissatisfied, just as he was. Here he was, thinking so recently of going away somewhere himself, wondering how the family would take it, and now she had gone

before him. How would that affect his point of view and action in the future? Truly, in spite of his father's and mother's misery, he could not see that her going was such a calamity, not from the *going* point of view, at any rate. It was only another something which hinted that things were not right here. Mission work was nothing. All this religious emotion and talk was not so much either. It hadn't saved Esta. Evidently, like himself, she didn't believe so much in it, either.

CHAPTER IV

THE effect of this particular conclusion was to cause Clyde to think harder than ever about himself. And the principal result of his thinking was that he must do something for himself and soon. Up to this time the best he had been able to do was to work at such odd jobs as befall all boys between their twelfth and fifteenth years: assisting a man who had a paper route during the summer months of one year, working in the basement of a five-and-ten cent store all one summer long, and on Saturdays, for a period during the winter, opening boxes and unpacking goods, for which he received the munificent sum of five dollars a week, a sum which at the time seemed almost a fortune. He felt himself rich and, in the face of the opposition of his parents, who were opposed to the theater and motion pictures also, as being not only worldly, but sinful, he could occasionally go to one or another of those—in the gallery—a form of diversion which he had to conceal from his parents. Yet that did not deter him. He felt that he had a right to go with his own money; also to take his younger brother Frank, who was glad enough to go with him and say nothing.

Later in the same year, wishing to get out of school because he already felt himself very much belated in the race, he secured a place as an assistant to a soda water clerk in one of the cheaper drug stores of the city, which adjoined a theater and enjoyed not a little patronage of this sort. A sign—"Boy Wanted"—since it was directly on his way to school, first interested him. Later, in conversation with the young man whose assistant he was to be, and from whom he was to learn the trade, assuming that he was sufficiently willing and facile, he gathered that if he mastered this art, he might make as much as fifteen and even eighteen dollars a week. It was rumored that Stroud's at the corner of 14th and Baltimore Streets paid that much to two of their clerks. The particular store to which he was applying paid only twelve, the standard salary of most places.

But to acquire this art, as he was now informed, required time and the friendly help of an expert. If he wished to come here and work for five to begin with—well, six, then, since his face fell—he might soon expect to know a great deal about the

art of mixing sweet drinks and decorating a large variety of ice-creams with liquid sweets, thus turning them into sundaes. For the time being apprenticeship meant washing and polishing all the machinery and implements of this particular counter, to say nothing of opening and sweeping out the store at so early an hour as seven-thirty, dusting, and delivering such orders as the owner of this drug store chose to send out by him. At such idle moments as his immediate superior—a Mr. Sieberling—twenty, dashing, self-confident, talkative, was too busy to fill all the orders, he might be called upon to mix such minor drinks—lemonades, coca-colas and the like—as the trade demanded.

Yet this interesting position, after due consultation with his mother, he decided to take. For one thing, it would provide him, as he suspected, with all the ice-cream sodas he desired, free—an advantage not to be disregarded. In the next place, as he saw it at the time, it was an open door to a trade—something which he lacked. Further, and not at all disadvantageously as he saw it, this store required his presence at night as late as twelve o'clock, with certain hours off during the day to compensate for this. And this took him out of his home at night—out of the ten-o'clock-boy class at last. They could not ask him to attend any meetings save on Sunday, and not even then, since he was supposed to work Sunday afternoons and evenings.

Next, the clerk who manipulated this particular soda fountain, quite regularly received passes from the manager of the theater next door, and into the lobby of which one door to the drug-store gave—a most fascinating connection to Clyde. It seemed so interesting to be working for a drug store thus intimately connected with a theater.

And best of all, as Clyde now found to his pleasure, and yet despair at times, the place was visited, just before and after the show on matinée days, by bevies of girls, single and en suite, who sat at the counter and giggled and chattered and gave their hair and their complexions last perfecting touches before the mirror. And Clyde, callow and inexperienced in the ways of the world, and those of the opposite sex, was never weary of observing the beauty, the daring, the self-sufficiency and the sweetness of these, as he saw them. For the first time in his life, while he busied himself with washing glasses, filling the ice-cream and syrup containers, arranging the lemons and oranges in the trays, he had an almost uninterrupted opportunity of studying these girls at close range. The wonder of them! For the most part, they were so well-dressed and smart-looking—the rings, pins, furs, delightful hats, pretty shoes they wore.

And so often he overheard them discussing such interesting things—parties, dances, dinners, the shows they had seen, the places in or near Kansas City to which they were soon going, the difference between the styles of this year and last, the fascination of certain actors and actresses—principally actors—who were now playing or soon coming to the city. And to this day, in his own home he had heard nothing of all this.

And very often one or another of these young beauties was accompanied by some male in evening suit, dress shirt, high hat, bow tie, white kid gloves and patent leather shoes, a costume which at that time Clyde felt to be the last word in all true distinction, beauty, gallantry and bliss. To be able to wear such a suit with such ease and air! To be able to talk to a girl after the manner and with the sang-froid of some of these gallants! What a true measure of achievement! No good-looking girl, as it then appeared to him, would have anything to do with him if he did not possess this standard of equipment. It was plainly necessary—the thing. And once he did attain it—was able to wear such clothes as these—well, then was he not well set upon the path that leads to all the blisses? All the joys of life would then most certainly be spread before him. The friendly smiles! The secret handclasps, maybe—an arm about the waist of some one or another—a kiss—a promise of marriage—and then, and then!

And all this as a revealing flash after all the years of walking through the streets with his father and mother to public prayer meeting, the sitting in chapel and listening to queer and nondescript individuals—depressing and disconcerting people—telling how Christ had saved them and what God had done for them. You bet he would get out of that now. He would work and save his money and be somebody. Decidedly this simple and yet idyllic compound of the commonplace had all the luster and wonder of a spiritual transfiguration, the true mirage of the lost and thirsting and seeking victim of the desert.

However, the trouble with this particular position, as time speedily proved, was that much as it might teach him of mixing drinks and how to eventually earn twelve dollars a week, it was no immediate solvent for the yearnings and ambitions that were already gnawing at his vitals. For Albert Sieberling, his immediate superior, was determined to keep as much of his knowledge, as well as the most pleasant parts of the tasks, to himself. And further he was quite at one with the druggist for whom they worked in thinking that Clyde, in addition to assisting him about the fountain, should run such errands as

the druggist desired, which kept Clyde industriously employed for nearly all the hours he was on duty.

Consequently there was no immediate result to all this. Clyde could see no way to dressing better than he did. Worse, he was haunted by the fact that he had very little money and very few contacts and connections—so few that, outside his own home, he was lonely and not so very much less than lonely there. The flight of Esta had thrown a chill over the religious work there, and because, as yet, she had not returned —the family, as he now heard, was thinking of breaking up here and moving, for want of a better idea, to Denver, Colorado. But Clyde, by now, was convinced that he did not wish to accompany them. What was the good of it, he asked himself? There would be just another mission there, the same as this one.

He had always lived at home—in the rooms at the rear of the mission in Bickel Street, but he hated it. And since his eleventh year, during all of which time his family had been residing in Kansas City, he had been ashamed to bring boy friends to or near it. For that reason he had always avoided boy friends, and had walked and played very much alone—or with his brothers and sisters.

But now that he was sixteen and old enough to make his own way, he ought to be getting out of this. And yet he was earning almost nothing—not enough to live on, if he were alone—and he had not as yet developed sufficient skill or courage to get anything better.

Nevertheless when his parents began to talk of moving to Denver, and suggested that he might secure work out there, never assuming for a moment that he would not want to go, he began to throw out hints to the effect that it might be better if he did not. He liked Kansas City. What was the use of changing? He had a job now and he might get something better. But his parents, bethinking themselves of Esta and the fate that had overtaken her, were not a little dubious as to the outcome of such early adventuring on his part alone. Once they were away, where would he live? With whom? What sort of influence would enter his life, who would be at hand to aid and council and guide him in the straight and narrow path, as they had done? It was something to think about.

But spurred by this imminence of Denver, which now daily seemed to be drawing nearer, and the fact that not long after this Mr. Sieberling, owing to his too obvious gallantries in connection with the fair sex, lost his place in the drug store, and Clyde came by a new and bony and chill superior who did not

seem to want him as an assistant, he decided to quit—not at once, but rather to see, on such errands as took him out of the store, if he could not find something else. Incidentally in so doing, looking here and there, he one day thought he would speak to the manager of the fountain which was connected with the leading drug store in the principal hotel of the city—the latter a great twelve-story affair, which represented, as he saw it, the quintessence of luxury and ease. Its windows were always so heavily curtained; the main entrance (he had never ventured to look beyond that) was a splendiferous combination of a glass and iron awning, coupled with a marble corridor lined with palms. Often he had passed here, wondering with boyish curiosity what the nature of the life of such a place might be. Before its doors, so many taxis and automobiles were always in waiting.

To-day, being driven by the necessity of doing something for himself, he entered the drug store which occupied the principal corner, facing 14th street at Baltimore, and finding a girl cashier in a small glass cage near the door, asked of her who was in charge of the soda fountain. Interested by his tentative and uncertain manner, as well as his deep and rather appealing eyes, and instinctively judging that he was looking for something to do, she observed: "Why, Mr. Secor, there, the manager of the store." She nodded in the direction of a short, meticulously dressed man of about thirty-five, who was arranging an especial display of toilet novelties on the top of a glass case. Clyde approached him, and being still very dubious as to how one went about getting anything in life, and finding him engrossed in what he was doing, stood first on one foot and then on the other, until at last, sensing some one was hovering about for something, the man turned: "Well?" he queried.

"You don't happen to need a soda fountain helper, do you?" Clyde cast at him a glance that said as plain as anything could, "If you have any such place, I wish you would please give it to me. I need it."

"No, no, no," replied this individual, who was blond and vigorous and by nature a little irritable and contentious. He was about to turn away, but seeing a flicker of disappointment and depression pass over Clyde's face, he turned and added, "Ever work in a place like this before?"

"No place as fine as this. No, sir," replied Clyde, rather fancifully moved by all that was about him. "I'm working now down at Mr. Klinkle's store at 7th and Brooklyn, but it isn't

anything like this one and I'd like to get something better if I could."

"Uh," went on his interviewer, rather pleased by the innocent tribute to the superiority of his store. "Well, that's reasonable enough. But there isn't anything here right now that I could offer you. We don't make many changes. But if you'd like to be a bell-boy, I can tell you where you might get a place. They're looking for an extra boy in the hotel inside there right now. The captain of the boys was telling me he was in need of one. I should think that would be as good as helping about a soda fountain, any day."

Then seeing Clyde's face suddenly brighten, he added: "But you mustn't say that I sent you, because I don't know you. Just ask for Mr. Squires inside there, under the stairs, and he can tell you all about it."

At the mere mention of work in connection with so imposing an institution as the Green-Davidson, and the possibility of his getting it, Clyde first stared, felt himself tremble the least bit with excitement, then thanking his advisor for his kindness, went direct to a green-marbled doorway which opened from the rear of this drug-store into the lobby of the hotel. Once through it, he beheld a lobby, the like of which, for all his years but because of the timorous poverty that had restrained him from exploring such a world, was more arresting, quite, than anything he had seen before. It was all so lavish. Under his feet was a checkered black-and-white marble floor. Above him a coppered and stained and gilded ceiling. And supporting this, a veritable forest of black marble columns as highly polished as the floor—glassy smooth. And between the columns which ranged away toward three separate entrances, one right, one left and one directly forward toward Dalrymple Avenue—were lamps, statuary, rugs, palms, chairs, divans, tête-à-têtes—a prodigal display. In short it was compact, of all that gauche luxury of appointment which, as some one once sarcastically remarked, was intended to supply "exclusiveness to the masses." Indeed, for an essential hotel in a great and successful American commercial city, it was almost too luxurious. Its rooms and hall and lobbies and restaurants were entirely too richly furnished, without the saving grace of either simplicity or necessity.

As Clyde stood, gazing about the lobby, he saw a large company of people—some women and children, but principally men as he could see—either walking or standing about and talking or idling in the chairs, side by side or alone. And in heavily draped

and richly furnished alcoves where were writing-tables, newspaper files, a telegraph office, a haberdasher's shop, and a florist's stand, were other groups. There was a convention of dentists in the city, not a few of whom, with their wives and children, were gathered here; but to Clyde, who was not aware of this nor of the methods and meanings of conventions, this was the ordinary, everyday appearance of this hotel.

He gazed about in awe and amazement, then remembering the name of Squires, he began to look for him in his office "under the stairs." To his right was a grand double-winged black-and-white staircase which swung in two separate flights and with wide, generous curves from the main floor to the one above. And between these great flights was evidently the office of the hotel, for there were many clerks there. But behind the nearest flight, and close to the wall through which he had come, was a tall desk, at which stood a young man of about his own age in a maroon uniform bright with many brass buttons. And on his head was a small, round, pill-box cap, which was cocked jauntily over one ear. He was busy making entries with a lead pencil in a book which lay open before him. Various other boys about his own age, and uniformed as he was, were seated upon a long bench near him, or were to be seen darting here and there, sometimes returning to this one with a slip of paper or a key or note of some kind, and then seating themselves upon the bench to await another call apparently, which seemed to come swiftly enough. A telephone upon the small desk at which stood the uniformed youth was almost constantly buzzing, and after ascertaining what was wanted, this youth struck a small bell before him, or called "front," to which the first boy on the bench, responded. Once called, they went hurrying up one or the other stairs or toward one of the several entrances or elevators, and almost invariably were to be seen escorting individuals whose bags and suitcases and overcoats and golf sticks they carried. There were others who disappeared and returned, carrying drinks on trays or some package or other, which they were taking to one of the rooms above. Plainly this was the work that he should be called upon to do, assuming that he would be so fortunate as to connect himself with such an institution as this.

And it was all so brisk and enlivening that he wished that he might be so fortunate as to secure a position here. But would he be? And where was Mr. Squires? He approached the youth at the small desk: "Do you know where I will find Mr. Squires?" he asked.

"Here he comes now," replied the youth, looking up and examining Clyde with keen, gray eyes.

Clyde gazed in the direction indicated, and saw approaching a brisk and dapper and decidedly sophisticated-looking person of perhaps twenty-nine or thirty years of age. He was so very slender, keen, hatchet-faced and well-dressed that Clyde was not only impressed but overawed at once—a very shrewd and cunning-looking person. His nose was so long and thin, his eyes so sharp, his lips thin, and chin pointed.

"Did you see that tall, gray-haired man with the Scotch plaid shawl who went through here just now?" he paused to say to his assistant at the desk. The assistant nodded. "Well, they tell me that's the Earl of Landreil. He just came in this morning with fourteen trunks and four servants. Can you beat it! He's somebody in Scotland. That isn't the name he travels under, though, I hear. He's registered as Mr. Blunt. Can you beat that English stuff? They can certainly lay on the class, eh?"

"You said it!" replied his assistant deferentially.

He turned for the first time, glimpsing Clyde, but paying no attention to him. His assistant came to Clyde's aid.

"That young fella there is waiting to see you," he explained.

"You want to see me?" queried the captain of the bell-hops, turning to Clyde, and observing his none-too-good clothes, at the same time making a comprehensive study of him.

"The gentleman in the drug store," began Clyde, who did not quite like the looks of the man before him, but was determined to present himself as agreeably as possible, "was saying—that is, he said that I might ask you if there was any chance here for me as a bell-boy. I'm working now at Klinkle's drug-store at 7th and Brooklyn, as a helper, but I'd like to get out of that and he said you might—that is—he thought you had a place open now." Clyde was so flustered and disturbed by the cool, examining eyes of the man before him that he could scarcely get his breath properly, and swallowed hard.

For the first time in his life, it occurred to him that if he wanted to get on he ought to insinuate himself into the good graces of people—do or say something that would make them like him. So now he contrived an eager, ingratiating smile, which he bestowed on Mr. Squires, and added: "If you'd like to give me a chance, I'd try very hard and I'd be very willing."

The man before him merely looked at him coldly, but being the soul of craft and self-acquisitiveness in a petty way, and rather liking anybody who had the skill and the will to be

diplomatic, he now put aside an impulse to shake his head negatively, and observed: "But you haven't had any training in this work."

"No, sir, but couldn't I pick it up pretty quick if I tried hard?"

"Well, let me see," observed the head of the bell-hops, scratching his head dubiously. "I haven't any time to talk to you now. Come around Monday afternoon. I'll see you then." He turned on his heel and walked away.

Clyde, left alone in this fashion, and not knowing just what it meant, stared, wondering. Was it really true that he had been invited to come back on Monday? Could it be possible that—— He turned and hurried out, thrilling from head to toe. The idea! He had asked this man for a place in the very finest hotel in Kansas City and he had asked him to come back and see him on Monday. Gee! what would that mean? Could it be possible that he would be admitted to such a grand world as this —and that so speedily? Could it really be?

CHAPTER V

THE imaginative flights of Clyde in connection with all this—his dreams of what it might mean for him to be connected with so glorious an institution—can only be suggested. For his ideas of luxury were in the main so extreme and mistaken and gauche—mere wanderings of a repressed and unsatisfied fancy, which as yet had had nothing but imaginings to feed it.

He went back to his old duties at the drug-store—to his home after hours in order to eat and sleep—but now for the balance of this Friday and Saturday and Sunday and Monday until late in the day, he walked on air, really. His mind was not on what he was doing, and several times his superior at the drug-store had to remind him to "wake-up." And after hours, instead of going directly home, he walked north to the corner of 14th and Baltimore, where stood this great hotel, and looked at it. There, at midnight even, before each of the three principal entrances—one facing each of three streets—was a doorman in a long maroon coat with many buttons and a high-rimmed and long-visored maroon cap. And inside, behind looped and fluted French silk curtains, were the still blazing lights, the à la carte dining-room and the American grill in the basement near one corner still open. And about them were many taxis and cars. And there was music always—from somewhere.

After surveying it all this Friday night and again on Saturday and Sunday morning, he returned on Monday afternoon at the suggestion of Mr. Squires and was greeted by that individual rather crustily, for by then he had all but forgotten him. But seeing that at the moment he was actually in need of help, and being satisfied that Clyde might be of service, he led him into his small office under the stair, where, with a very superior manner and much actual indifference, he proceeded to question him as to his parentage, where he lived, at what he had worked before and where, what his father did for a living—a poser that for Clyde, for he was proud and so ashamed to admit that his parents conducted a mission and preached on the streets. Instead he replied (which was true at times) that his father canvassed for a washing machine and wringer company—and

on Sundays preached—a religious revelation, which was not at all displeasing to this master of boys who were inclined to be anything but home-loving and conservative. Could he bring a reference from where he now was? He could.

Mr. Squires proceeded to explain that this hotel was very strict. Too many boys, on account of the scenes and the show here, the contact with undue luxury to which they were not accustomed—though these were not the words used by Mr. Squires—were inclined to lose their heads and go wrong. He was constantly being forced to discharge boys who, because they made a little extra money, didn't know how to conduct themselves. He must have boys who were willing, civil, prompt, courteous to everybody. They must be clean and neat about their persons and clothes and show up promptly—on the dot—and in good condition for the work every day. And any boy who got to thinking that because he made a little money he could flirt with anybody or talk back, or go off on parties at night, and then not show up on time or too tired to be quick and bright, needn't think that he would be here long. He would be fired, and that promptly. He would not tolerate any nonsense. That must be understood now, once and for all.

Clyde nodded assent often and interpolated a few eager "yes, sirs" and "no, sirs," and assured him at the last that it was the furtherest thing from his thoughts and temperament to dream of any such high crimes and misdemeanors as he had outlined. Mr. Squires then proceeded to explain that this hotel only paid fifteen dollars a month and board—at the servant's table in the basement—to any bell-boy at any time. But, and this information came as a most amazing revelation to Clyde, every guest for whom any of these boys did anything—carried a bag or delivered a pitcher of water or did anything—gave him a tip, and often quite a liberal one—a dime, fifteen cents, a quarter, sometimes more. And these tips, as Mr. Squires explained, taken all together, averaged from four to six dollars a day—not less and sometimes more—most amazing pay, as Clyde now realized. His heart gave an enormous bound and was near to suffocating him at the mere mention of so large a sum. From four to six dollars! Why, that was twenty-eight to forty-two dollars a week! He could scarcely believe it. And that in addition to the fifteen dollars a month and board. And there was no charge, as Mr. Squires now explained, for the handsome uniforms the boys wore. But it might not be worn or taken out of the place. His hours, as Mr. Squires now pro-

ceeded to explain, would be as follows: On Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays, he was to work from six in the morning until noon, and then, with six hours off, from six in the evening until midnight. On Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, he need only work from noon until six, thus giving him each alternate afternoon or evening to himself. But all his meals were to be taken outside his working hours and he was to report promptly in uniform for line-up and inspection by his superior exactly ten minutes before the regular hours of his work began at each watch.

As for some other things which were in his mind at the time, Mr. Squires said nothing. There were others, as he knew, who would speak for him. Instead he went on to add, and then quite climactically for Clyde at that time, who had been sitting as one in a daze: "I suppose you are ready to go to work now, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir, yes, sir," he replied.

"Very good!" Then he got up and opened the door which had shut them in. "Oscar," he called to a boy seated at the head of the bell-boy bench, to which a tallish, rather oversized youth in a tight, neat-looking uniform responded with alacrity. "Take this young man here—Clyde Griffiths is your name, isn't it?—up to the wardrobe on the twelfth and see if Jacobs can find a suit to fit. But if he can't, tell him to alter it by to-morrow. I think the one Silsbee wore ought to be about right for him."

Then he turned to his assistant at the desk who was at the moment looking on. "I'm giving him a trial, anyhow," he commented. "Have one of the boys coach him a little to-night or whenever he starts in. Go ahead, Oscar," he called to the boy in charge of Clyde. "He's green at this stuff, but I think he'll do," he added to his assistant, as Clyde and Oscar disappeared in the direction of one of the elevators. Then he walked off to have Clyde's name entered upon the payroll.

In the meantime, Clyde, in tow of this new mentor, was listening to a line of information such as never previously had come to his ears anywhere.

"You needn't be frightened, if you ain't never worked at anything like dis before," began this youth, whose last name was Hegglund as Clyde later learned, and who hailed from Jersey City, New Jersey, exotic lingo, gestures and all. He was tall, vigorous, sandy-haired, freckled, genial and voluble. They had entered upon an elevator labeled "employees." "It ain't so hard. I got my first job in Buffalo t'ree years ago and I

never knowed a t'ing about it up to dat time. All you gotta do is to watch de udders an' see how dey do, see. Yu get dat, do you?"

Clyde, whose education was not a little superior to that of his guide, commented quite sharply in his own mind on the use of such words as "knowed," and "gotta"—also upon "t'ing," "dat," "udders," and so on, but so grateful was he for any courtesy at this time that he was inclined to forgive his obviously kindly mentor anything for his geniality.

"Watch whoever's doin' anyt'ing, at first, see, till you git to know, see. Dat's de way. When de bell rings, if you're at de head of de bench, it's your turn, see, an' you jump up and go quick. Dey like you to be quick around here, see. An' whenever you see any one come in de door or out of an elevator wit a bag, an' you're at de head of de bench, you jump, wedder de captain rings de bell or calls 'front' or not. Sometimes he's busy or ain't lookin' an' he wants you to do dat, see. Look sharp, cause if you don't get no bags, you don't get no tips, see. Everybody dat has a bag or anyt'ing has to have it carried for 'em, unless dey won't let you have it, see.

"But be sure and wait somewhere near de desk for whoever comes in until dey sign up for a room," he rattled on as they ascended in the elevator. "Most every one takes a room. Den de clerk'll give you de key an' after dat all you gotta do is to carry up de bags to de room. Den all you gotta do is to turn on de lights in de batroom and closet, if dere is one, so dey'll know where dey are, see. An' den raise de curtains in de day time or lower 'em at night, an' see if dere's towels in de room, so you can tell de maid if dere ain't, and den if dey don't give you no tip, you gotta go, only most times, unless you draw a stiff, all you gotta do is hang back a little—make a stall, see—fumble wit de door-key or try de transom, see. Den, if dey're any good, dey'll hand you a tip. If dey don't, you're out, dat's all, see. You can't even look as dough you was sore, dough—nottin' like dat, see. Den you come down an' unless dey wants ice-water or somepin, you're troo, see. It's back to de bench, quick. Dere ain't much to it. Only you gotta be quick all de time, see, and not let any one get by you comin' or goin'—dat's de main t'ing.

"An' after dey give you your uniform, an' you go to work, don't forgit to give de captain a dollar after every watch before you leave, see—two dollars on de day you has two watches, and a dollar on de day you has one, see? Dat's de way it is here. We work togedder like dat, here, an' you gotta do dat if you

wanta hold your job. But dat's all. After dat all de rest is yours."

Clyde saw.

A part of his twenty-four or thirty-two dollars as he figured it was going glimmering, apparently—eleven or twelve all told—but what of it! Would there not be twelve or fifteen or even more left? And there were his meals and his uniform. Kind Heaven! What a realization of paradise! What a consummation of luxury!

Mr. Hegglund of Jersey City escorted him to the twelfth floor and into a room where they found on guard a wizened and grizzled little old man of doubtful age and temperament, who forthwith outfitted Clyde with a suit that was so near a fit that, without further orders, it was not deemed necessary to alter it. And trying on various caps, there was one that fitted him—a thing that sat most rakishly over one ear—only, as Hegglund informed him, "You'll have to get dat hair of yours cut. Better get it clipped behind. It's too long." And with that Clyde himself had been in mental agreement before he spoke. His hair certainly did not look right in the new cap. He hated it now. And going downstairs, and reporting to Mr. Whipple, Mr. Squires' assistant, the latter had said: "Very well. It fits all right, does it? Well, then, you go on here at six. Report at five-thirty and be here in your uniform at five-forty-five for inspection."

Whereupon Clyde, being advised by Hegglund to go then and there to get his uniform and take it to the dressing-room in the basement, and get his locker from the locker-man, he did so, and then hurried most nervously out—first to get a hair-cut and afterwards to report to his family on his great luck.

He was to be a bell-boy in the great Hotel Green-Davidson. He was to wear a uniform and a handsome one. He was to make—but he did not tell his mother at first what he was to make, truly—but more than eleven or twelve at first, anyhow, he guessed—he could not be sure. For now, all at once, he saw economic independence ahead for himself, if not for his family, and he did not care to complicate it with any claims which a confession as to his real salary would most certainly inspire. But he did say that he was to have his meals free—because that meant eating away from home, which was what he wished. And in addition he was to live and move always in the glorious atmosphere of this hotel—not to have to go home ever before twelve, if he did not wish—to have good clothes—interesting company, maybe—a good time, gee!

And as he hurried on about his various errands now, it occurred to him as a final and shrewd and delicious thought that he need not go home on such nights as he wished to go to a theater or anything like that. He could just stay down-town and say he had to work. And that with free meals and good clothes—think of that!

The mere thought of all this was so astonishing and entrancing that he could not bring himself to think of it too much. He must wait and see. He must wait and see just how much he would make here in this perfectly marvelous-marvelous realm.

CHAPTER VI

AND as conditions stood, the extraordinary economic and social inexperience of the Griffiths—Asa and Elvira—dovetailed all too neatly with his dreams. For neither Asa nor Elvira had the least knowledge of the actual character of the work upon which he was about to enter, scarcely any more than he did, or what it might mean to him morally, imaginatively, financially, or in any other way. For neither of them had ever stopped in a hotel above the fourth class in all their days. Neither one had ever eaten in a restaurant of a class that catered to other than individuals of their own low financial level. That there could be any other forms of work or contact than those involved in carrying the bags of guests to and from the door of a hotel to its office, and back again, for a boy of Clyde's years and temperament, never occurred to them. And it was naïvely assumed by both that the pay for such work must of necessity be very small anywhere, say five or six dollars a week, and so actually below Clyde's deserts and his years.

And in view of this, Mrs. Griffiths, who was more practical than her husband at all times, and who was intensely interested in Clyde's economic welfare, as well as that of her other children, was actually wondering why Clyde should of a sudden become so enthusiastic about changing to this new situation, which, according to his own story, involved longer hours and not so very much more pay, if any. To be sure, he had already suggested that it might lead to some superior position in the hotel, some clerkship or other, but he did not know when that would be, and the other had promised rather definite fulfillment somewhat earlier—as to money, anyhow.

But seeing him rush in on Monday afternoon and announce that he had secured the place and that forthwith he must change his tie and collar and get his hair cut and go back and report, she felt better about it. For never before had she seen him so enthusiastic about anything, and it was something to have him more content with himself—not so moody, as he was at times.

Yet, the hours which he began to maintain now—from six in the morning until midnight—with only an occasional early re-

turn on such evenings as he chose to come home when he was not working—and when he troubled to explain that he had been let off a little early—together with a certain eager and restless manner—a desire to be out and away from his home at nearly all such moments as he was not in bed or dressing or undressing, puzzled his mother and Asa, also. The hotel! The hotel! He must always hurry off to the hotel, and all that he had to report was that he liked it ever so much, and that he was doing all right, he thought. It was nicer work than working around a soda fountain, and he might be making more money pretty soon—he couldn't tell—but as for more than that he either wouldn't or couldn't say.

And all the time the Griffiths—father and mother—were feeling that because of the affair in connection with Esta, they should really be moving away from Kansas City—should go to Denver. And now more than ever, Clyde was insisting that he did not want to leave Kansas City. They might go, but he had a pretty good job now and wanted to stick to it. And if they left, he could get a room somewhere—and would be all right—a thought which did not appeal to them at all.

But in the meantime what an enormous change in Clyde's life. Beginning with that first evening, when at 5:45, he appeared before Mr. Whipple, his immediate superior, and was approved—not only because of the fit of his new uniform, but for his general appearance—the world for him had changed entirely. Lined up with seven others in the servants' hall, immediately behind the general offices in the lobby, and inspected by Mr. Whipple, the squad of eight marched at the stroke of six through a door that gave into the lobby on the other side of the staircase from where stood Mr. Whipple's desk, then about and in front of the general registration office to the long bench on the other side. A Mr. Barnes, who alternated with Mr. Whipple, then took charge of the assistant captain's desk, and the boys seated themselves—Clyde at the foot—only to be called swiftly and in turn to perform this, that and the other service—while the relieved squad of Mr. Whipple was led away into the rear servants' hall as before, where they disbanded.

"Cling!"

The bell on the room clerk's desk had sounded and the first boy was going.

"Cling!" It sounded again and a second boy leaped to his feet.

"Front!"—"Center door!" called Mr. Barnes, and a third boy was skidding down the long marble floor toward that en-

trance to seize the bags of an incoming guest, whose white whiskers and youthful, bright tweed suit were visible to Clyde's uninitiated eyes a hundred feet away. A mysterious and yet sacred vision—a tip!

"Front!" It was Mr. Barnes calling again. "See what 913 wants—ice-water, I guess." And a fourth boy was gone.

Clyde, steadily moving up along the bench and adjoining Hegglund, who had been detailed to instruct him a little, was all eyes and ears and nerves. He was so tense that he could hardly breathe, and fidgeted and jerked until finally Hegglund exclaimed: "Now, don't git excited. Just hold your horses, will yuh? You'll be all right. You're jist like I was when I begun —all noives. But dat ain't de way. Easy's what you gotta be aroun' here. An' you wants to look as dough you wasn't seein' nobody nowhere—just lookin' to what ya got before ya."

"Front!" Mr. Barnes again. Clyde was scarcely able to keep his mind on what Hegglund was saying. "115 wants some writing paper and pens." A fifth boy had gone.

"Where do you get writing paper and pens if they want em?" He pleaded of his instructor, as one who was about to die might plead.

"Off'n de key desk, I toldja. He's to de left over dere. He'll give 'em to ya. An' you gits ice-water in de hall we lined up in just a minute ago—at dat end over dere, see—you'll see a little door. You gotta give dat guy in dere a dime oncet in a while or he'll get sore."

"Cling!" The room clerk's bell. A sixth boy had gone without a word to supply some order in that direction.

"And now remember," continued Hegglund, seeing that he himself was next, and cautioning him for the last time, "if dey wants drinks of any kind, you get 'em in de grill over dere off'n de dining-room. An' be sure and git de names of de drinks straight or dey'll git sore. An' if it's a room you're showing, pull de shades down to-night and turn on de lights. An' if it's anyt'ing from de dinin'-room you gotta see de head-waiter —he gets de tip, see."

"Front!" He was up and gone.

And Clyde was number one. And number four was already seating himself again by his side—but looking shrewdly around to see if anybody was wanted anywhere.

"Front!" It was Mr. Barnes. Clyde was up and before him, grateful that it was no one coming in with bags, but worried for fear it might be something that he would not understand or could not do quickly.

"See what 882 wants." Clyde was off toward one of the two elevators marked, "employees," the proper one to use, he thought, because he had been taken to the twelfth floor that way, but another boy stepping out from one of the fast passenger elevators cautioned him as to his mistake.

"Goin' to a room?" he called. "Use the guest elevators. Them's for the servants or anybody with bundles."

Clyde hastened to cover his mistake. "Eight," he called. There being no one else on the elevator with them, the negro elevator boy in charge of the car saluted him at once.

"You'se new, ain't you? I ain't seen you around here befo'."

"Yes, I just came on," replied Clyde.

"Well, you won't hate it here," commented this youth in the most friendly way. "No one hates this house, I'll say. Eight did you say?" He stopped the car and Clyde stepped out. He was too nervous to think to ask the direction and now began looking at room numbers, only to decide after a moment that he was in the wrong corridor. The soft brown carpet under his feet; the soft, cream-tinted walls; the snow-white bowl lights set in the ceiling—all seemed to him parts of a perfection and a social superiority which was almost unbelievable—so remote from all that he had ever known.

And finally, finding 882, he knocked timidly and was greeted after a moment by a segment of a very stout and vigorous body in a blue and white striped union suit and a related segment of a round and florid head in which was set one eye and some wrinkles to one side of it.

"Here's a dollar bill, son," said the eye seemingly—and now a hand appeared holding a paper dollar. It was fat and red. "You go out to a haberdasher's and get me a pair of garters—Boston Garters—silk—and hurry back."

"Yes, sir," replied Clyde, and took the dollar. The door closed and he found himself hustling along the hall toward the elevator, wondering what a haberdasher's was. As old as he was—seventeen—the name was new to him. He had never even heard it before, or noticed it at least. If the man had said a "gents' furnishing store," he would have understood at once, but now here he was told to go to a haberdasher's and he did not know what it was. A cold sweat burst out upon his forehead. His knees trembled. The devil! What would he do now? Could he ask any one, even Hegglund, and not seem——

He pushed the elevator button. The car began to descend. A haberdasher. A haberdasher. Suddenly a sane thought reached him. Supposing he didn't know what a haberdasher was? After

all the man wanted a pair of silk Boston garters. Where did one get silk Boston garters—at a store, of course, a place where they sold things for men. Certainly. A gents' furnishing store. He would run out to a store. And on the way down, noting another friendly negro in charge, he asked: "Do you know if there's a gents' furnishing store anywhere around here?"

"One in the building, captain, right outside the south lobby," replied the negro, and Clyde hurried there, greatly relieved. Yet he felt odd and strange in his close-fitting uniform and his peculiar hat. All the time he was troubled by the notion that his small round, tight-fitting hat might fall off. And he kept pressing it furtively and yet firmly down. And bustling into the haberdasher's, which was blazing with lights outside, he exclaimed, "I want to get a pair of Boston silk garters."

"All right, son, here you are," replied a sleek, short man with bright, bald head, pink face and gold-rimmed glasses. "For some one in the hotel, I presume? Well, we'll make that seventy-five cents, and here's a dime for you," he remarked as he wrapped up the package and dropped the dollar in the cash register. "I always like to do the right thing by you boys in there because I know you come to me whenever you can."

Clyde took the dime and the package, not knowing quite what to think. The garters must be seventy-five cents—he said so. Hence only twenty-five cents need to be returned to the man. Then the dime was his. And now, maybe—would the man really give him another tip?

He hurried back into the hotel and up to the elevators. The strains of a string orchestra somewhere were filling the lobby with delightful sounds. People were moving here and there—so well-dressed, so much at ease, so very different from most of the people in the streets or anywhere, as he saw it.

An elevator door flew open. Various guests entered. Then Clyde and another bell-boy who gave him an interested glance. At the sixth floor the boy departed. At the eighth Clyde and an old lady stepped forth. He hurried to the door of his guest and tapped. The man opened it, somewhat more fully dressed than before. He had on a pair of trousers and was shaving.

"Back, eh," he called.

"Yes, sir," replied Clyde, handing him the package and change. "He said it was seventy-five cents."

"He's a damned robber, but you can keep the change, just the same," he replied, handing him the quarter and closing the door. Clyde stood there, quite spellbound for the fraction of a second. "Thirty-five cents"—he thought—"thirty-five cents."

And for one little short errand. Could that really be the way things went here? It couldn't be, really. It wasn't possible—not always.

And then, his feet sinking in the soft nap of the carpet, his hand in one pocket clutching the money, he felt as if he could squeal or laugh out loud. Why, thirty-five cents—and for a little service like that. This man had given him a quarter and the other a dime and he hadn't done anything at all.

He hurried from the car at the bottom—the strains of the orchestra once more fascinated him, the wonder of so well-dressed a throng thrilling him—and made his way to the bench from which he had first departed.

And following this he had been called to carry the three bags and two umbrellas of an aged farmer-like couple, who had engaged a parlor, bedroom and bath on the fifth floor. En route they kept looking at him, as he could see, but said nothing. Yet once in their room, and after he had promptly turned on the lights near the door, lowered the blinds and placed the bags upon the bag racks, the middle-aged and rather awkward husband—a decidedly solemn and bewhiskered person—studied him and finally observed: "Young fella, you seem to be a nice, brisk sort of boy—rather better than most we've seen so far, I must say."

"I certainly don't think that hotels are any place for boys," chirped up the wife of his bosom—a large and rotund person, who by this time was busily employed inspecting an adjoining room. "I certainly wouldn't want any of my boys to work in 'em—the way people act."

"But here, young man," went on the elder, laying off his overcoat and fishing in his trousers pocket. "You go down and get me three or four evening papers if there are that many and a pitcher of ice-water, and I'll give you fifteen cents when you get back."

"This hotel's better'n the one in Omaha, Pa," added the wife sententiously. "It's got nicer carpets and curtains."

And as green as Clyde was, he could not help smiling secretly. Openly, however, he preserved a masklike solemnity, seemingly effacing all facial evidence of thought, and took the change and went out. And in a few moments he was back with the ice-water and all the evening papers and departed smilingly with his fifteen cents.

But this, in itself, was but a beginning in so far as this particular evening was concerned, for he was scarcely seated upon the bench again, before he was called to room 529, only to be

sent to the bar for drinks—two ginger ales and two syphons of soda—and this by a group of smartly-dressed young men and girls who were laughing and chattering in the room, one of whom opened the door just wide enough to instruct him as to what was wanted. But because of a mirror over the mantel, he could see the party and one pretty girl in a white suit and cap, sitting on the edge of a chair in which reclined a young man who had his arm about her.

Clyde stared, even while pretending not to. And in his state of mind, this sight was like looking through the gates of Paradise. Here were young fellows and girls in this room, not so much older than himself, laughing and talking and drinking even—not ice-cream sodas and the like, but such drinks no doubt as his mother and father were always speaking against as leading to destruction, and apparently nothing was thought of it.

He bustled down to the bar, and having secured the drinks and a charge slip, returned—and was paid—a dollar and a half for the drinks and a quarter for himself. And once more he had a glimpse of the appealing scene. Only now one of the couples was dancing to a tune sung and whistled by the other two.

But what interested him as much as the visits to and glimpses of individuals in the different rooms, was the moving panorama of the main lobby—the character of the clerks behind the main desk—room clerk, key clerk, mail clerk, cashier and assistant cashier. And the various stands about the place—flower stand, news stand, cigar stand, telegraph office, taxicab office, and all manned by individuals who seemed to him curiously filled with the atmosphere of this place. And then around and between all these walking or sitting were such imposing men and women, young men and girls all so fashionably dressed, all so ruddy and contented looking. And the cars or other vehicles in which some of them appeared about dinner time and later. It was possible for him to see them in the flare of the lights outside. The wraps, furs, and other belongings in which they appeared, or which were often carried by these other boys and himself across the great lobby and into the cars or the dining-room or the several elevators. And they were always of such gorgeous textures, as Clyde saw them. Such grandeur. This, then, most certainly was what it meant to be rich, to be a person of consequence in the world—to have money. It meant that you did what you pleased. That other people, like himself, waited upon you. That you possessed all of these luxuries. That you went how, where and when you pleased.

CHAPTER VII

AND so, of all the influences which might have come to Clyde at this time, either as an aid or an injury to his development, perhaps the most dangerous for him, considering his temperament, was this same Green-Davidson, than which no more materially affected or gaudy a realm could have been found anywhere between the two great American mountain ranges. Its darkened and cushioned tea-room, so somber and yet tinted so gayly with colored lights, was an ideal rendezvous, not only for such inexperienced and eager flappers of the period who were to be taken by a show of luxury, but also for those more experienced and perhaps a little faded beauties, who had a thought for their complexions and the advantages of dim and uncertain lights. Also, like most hotels of its kind, it was frequented by a certain type of eager and ambitious male of no certain age or station in life, who counted upon his appearance here at least once, if not twice a day, at certain brisk and interesting hours, to establish for himself the reputation of man-about-town, or rounder, or man of wealth, or taste, or attractiveness, or all.

And it was not long after Clyde had begun to work here that he was informed by these peculiar boys with whom he was associated, one or more of whom was constantly seated with him upon the "hop-bench," as they called it, as to the evidence and presence even here—it was not long before various examples of the phenomena were pointed out to him—of a certain type of social pervert, morally disarranged and socially taboo, who sought to arrest and interest boys of their type, in order to come into some form of illicit relationship with them, which at first Clyde could not grasp. The mere thought of it made him ill. And yet some of these boys, as he was now informed—a certain youth in particular, who was not on the same watch with him at this time—were supposed to be of the mind that "fell for it," as one of the other youths phrased it.

And the talk and the palaver that went on in the lobby and the grill, to say nothing of the restaurants and rooms, were sufficient to convince any inexperienced and none-too-discerning mind that the chief business of life for any one with a little money or social position was to attend a theater, a ball-game

in season, or to dance, motor, entertain friends at dinner, or to travel to New York, Europe, Chicago, California. And there had been in the lives of most of these boys such a lack of anything that approached comfort or taste, let alone luxury, that not unlike Clyde, they were inclined to not only exaggerate the import of all that they saw, but to see in this sudden transition an opportunity to partake of it all. Who were these people with money, and what had they done that they should enjoy so much luxury, where others as good seemingly as themselves had nothing? And wherein did these latter differ so greatly from the successful? Clyde could not see. Yet these thoughts flashed through the minds of every one of these boys.

At the same time the admiration, to say nothing of the private overtures of a certain type of woman or girl, who inhibited perhaps by the social milieu in which she found herself, but having means, could invade such a region as this, and by wiles and smiles and the money she possessed, ingratiate herself into the favor of some of the more attractive of these young men here, was much commented upon.

Thus a youth named Ratterer—a hall-boy here—sitting beside him the very next afternoon, seeing a trim, well-formed blonde woman of about thirty enter with a small dog upon her arm, and much bedecked with furs, first nudged him and, with a faint motion of the head indicating her vicinity, whispered, "See her? There's a swift one. I'll tell you about her sometime when I have time. Gee, the things she don't do!"

"What about her?" asked Clyde, keenly curious, for to him she seemed exceedingly beautiful, most fascinating.

"Oh, nothing, except she's been in with about eight different men around here since I've been here. She fell for Doyle"—another hall-boy whom by this time Clyde had already observed as being the quintessence of Chesterfieldian grace and airs and looks, a youth to imitate—"for a while, but now she's got some one else."

"Really?" inquired Clyde, very much astonished and wondering if such luck would ever come to him.

"Surest thing you know," went on Ratterer. "She's a bird that way—never gets enough. Her husband, they tell me, has a big lumber business somewhere over in Kansas, but they don't live together no more. She has one of the best suites on the sixth, but she ain't in it half the time. The maid told me."

This same Ratterer, who was short and stocky but good-looking and smiling, was so smooth and bland and generally agreeable that Clyde was instantly drawn to him and wished

to know him better. And Ratterer reciprocated that feeling, for he had the notion that Clyde was innocent and inexperienced and that he would like to do some little thing for him if he could.

The conversation was interrupted by a service call, and never resumed about this particular woman, but the effect on Clyde was sharp. The woman was pleasing to look upon and exceedingly well-groomed, her skin clear, her eyes bright. Could what Ratterer had been telling him really be true? She was so pretty. He sat and gazed, a vision of something which he did not care to acknowledge even to himself tingling the roots of his hair.

And then the temperaments and the philosophy of these boys—Kinsella, short and thick and smooth-faced and a little dull, as Clyde saw it, but good-looking and virile, and reported to be a wizard at gambling, who, throughout the first three days at such times as other matters were not taking his attention, had been good enough to continue Hegglund's instructions in part. He was a more suave, better spoken youth than Hegglung, though not so attractive as Ratterer, Clyde thought, without the latter's sympathetic outlook, as Clyde saw it.

And again, there was Doyle—Eddie—whom Clyde found intensely interesting from the first, and of whom he was not a little jealous, because he was so very good-looking, so trim of figure, easy and graceful of gesture, and with so soft and pleasing a voice. He went about with an indescribable air which seemed to ingratiate him instantly with all with whom he came in contact—the clerks behind the counter no less than the strangers who entered and asked this or that question of him. His shoes and collar were so clean and trim, and his hair cut and brushed and oiled after a fashion which would have become a moving-picture actor. From the first Clyde was utterly fascinated by his taste in the matter of dress—the neatest of brown suits, caps, with ties and socks to match. He should wear a brown-belted coat just like that. He should have a brown cap. And a suit as well cut and attractive.

Similarly, a not unrelated and yet different effect was produced by that same youth who had first introduced Clyde to the work here—Hegglund—who was one of the older and more experienced bell-hops, and of considerable influence with the others because of his genial and devil-may-care attitude toward everything, outside the exact line of his hotel duties. Hegglund was neither as schooled nor as attractive as some of the others, yet by reason of a most avid and dynamic disposition—plus a liberality where money and pleasure were concerned, and a courage, strength and daring which neither Doyle nor Rat-

terer nor Kinsella could match—a strength and daring almost entirely divested of reason at times—he interested and charmed Clyde immensely. As he himself related to Clyde, after a time, he was the son of a Swedish journeyman baker who some years before in Jersey City had deserted his mother and left her to make her way as best she could. In consequence neither Oscar nor his sister Martha had had any too much education or decent social experience of any kind. On the contrary, at the age of fourteen he had left Jersey City in a box car and had been making his way ever since as best he could. And like Clyde, also, he was insanely eager for all the pleasures which he had imagined he saw swirling around him, and was for prosecuting adventures in every direction, lacking, however, the nervous fear of consequence which characterized Clyde. Also he had a friend, a youth by the name of Sparser, somewhat older than himself, who was chauffeur to a wealthy citizen of Kansas City, and who occasionally managed to purloin a car and so accommodate Hegglund in the matter of brief outings here and there; which courtesy, unconventional and dishonest though it might be, still caused Hegglund to feel that he was a wonderful fellow and of much more importance than some of these others, and to lend him in their eyes a luster which had little of the reality which it suggested to them.

Not being as attractive as Doyle, it was not so easy for him to win the attention of girls, and those he did succeed in interesting were not of the same charm or import by any means. Yet he was inordinately proud of such contacts as he could effect and not a little given to boasting in regard to them, a thing which Clyde took with more faith than would most, being of less experience. For this reason Hegglund liked Clyde, almost from the very first, sensing in him perhaps a pleased and willing auditor.

So, finding Clyde on the bench beside him from time to time, he had proceeded to continue his instructions. Kansas City was a fine place to be if you knew how to live. He had worked in other cities—Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit, St. Louis—before he came here, but he had not liked any of them any better, principally—which was a fact which he did not trouble to point out at the time—because he had not done as well in those places as he had here. He had been a dish-washer, car-cleaner, plumber's helper and several other things before finally, in Buffalo, he had been inducted into the hotel business. And then a youth, working there, but who was now no longer here, had persuaded him to come on to Kansas City. But here:

"Say—de tips in dis hotel is as big as you'll git anywhere,

I know dat. An' what's more, dey's nice people workin' here. You do your bit by dem and dey'll do right by you. I been here now over a year an' I ain't got no complaint. Dat guy Squires is all right if you don't cause him no trouble. He's hard, but he's got to look out for hisself, too—dat's natural. But he don't fire nobody unless he's got a reason. I know dat, too. And as for de rest dere's no trouble. An' when your work's troo, your time's your own. Dese fellows here are good sports, all o' dem. Dey're no four-flushers an' no tightwads, eider. Whenever dere's anyting on—a good time or sumpin' like dat, dere on—nearly all of 'em. An' dey don't mooch or grouch in case tings don't work out right, neider. I know dat, cause I been wit 'em now, lots o' times."

He gave Clyde the impression that these youths were all the best of friends—close—all but Doyle, who was a little stand-offish, but not coldly so. "He's got too many women chasin' him, dat's all." Also that they went here and there together on occasion—to a dance hall, a dinner, a certain gambling joint down near the river, a certain pleasure resort—"Kate Sweeney's" —where were some peaches of girls—and so on and so forth, a world of such information as had never previously been poured into Clyde's ear, and that set him meditating, dreaming, doubting, worrying and questioning as to the wisdom, charm, delight to be found in all this—also the permissibility of it in so far as he was concerned. For had he not been otherwise instructed in regard to all this all his life long? There was a great thrill and yet a great question involved in all to which he was now listening so attentively.

Again there was Thomas Ratterer, who was of a type which at first glance, one would have said, could scarcely prove either inimical or dangerous to any of the others. He was not more than five feet four, plump, with black hair and olive skin, and with an eye that was as limpid as water and as genial as could be. He, too, as Clyde learned after a time, was of a nondescript family, and so had profited by no social or financial advantages of any kind. But he had a way, and was liked by all of these youths—so much so that he was consulted about nearly everything. A native of Wichita, recently moved to Kansas City, he and his sister were the principal support of a widowed mother. During their earlier and formative years, both had seen their very good-natured and sympathetic mother, of whom they were honestly fond, spurned and abused by a faithless husband. There had been times when they were quite without food. On more than one occasion they had been ejected for non-payment of rent.

None too continuously Tommy and his sister had been maintained in various public schools. Finally, at the age of fourteen he had decamped to Kansas City, where he had secured different odd jobs, until he succeeded in connecting himself with the Green-Davidson, and was later joined by his mother and sister who had removed from Wichita to Kansas City to be with him.

But even more than by the luxury of the hotel or these youths, whom swiftly and yet surely he was beginning to decipher, Clyde was impressed by the downpour of small change that was tumbling in upon him and making a small lump in his right-hand pants pocket—dimes, nickels, quarters and half-dollars even, which increased and increased even on the first day until by nine o'clock he already had over four dollars in his pocket, and by twelve, at which hour he went off duty, he had over six and a half—as much as previously he had earned in a week.

And of all this, as he then knew, he need only hand Mr. Squires one—no more, Hegglund had said—and the rest, five dollars and a half, for one evening's interesting—yes, delightful and fascinating—work, belonged to himself. He could scarcely believe it. It seemed fantastic, Aladdinish, really. Nevertheless, at twelve, exactly, of that first day a gong had sounded somewhere—a shuffle of feet had been heard and three boys had appeared—one to take Barnes' place at the desk, the other two to answer calls. And at the command of Barnes, the eight who were present were ordered to rise, right dress and march away. And in the hall outside, and just as he was leaving, Clyde approached Mr. Squires and handed him a dollar in silver. "That's right," Mr. Squires remarked. No more. Then, Clyde, along with the others, descended to his locker, changed his clothes and walked out into the darkened streets, a sense of luck and a sense of responsibility as to future luck so thrilling him as to make him rather tremulous—giddy, even.

To think that now, at last, he actually had such a place. To think that he could earn this much every day, maybe. He began to walk toward his home, his first thought being that he must sleep well and so be fit for his duties in the morning. But thinking that he would not need to return to the hotel before 11:30 the next day, he wandered into an all-night beanery to have a cup of coffee and some pie. And now all he was thinking was that he would only need to work from noon until six, when he should be free until the following morning at six. And then he would make more money. A lot of it to spend on himself.

CHAPTER VIII

THE thing that most interested Clyde at first was how, if at all, he was to keep the major portion of all this money he was making for himself. For ever since he had been working and earning money, it had been assumed that he would contribute a fair portion of all that he received—at least three-fourths of the smaller salaries he had received up to this time—toward the upkeep of the home. But now, if he announced that he was receiving at least twenty-five dollars a week and more—and this entirely apart from the salary of fifteen a month and board—his parents would assuredly expect him to pay ten or twelve.

But so long had he been haunted by the desire to make himself as attractive looking as any other well-dressed boy that, now that he had the opportunity, he could not resist the temptation to equip himself first and as speedily as possible. Accordingly, he decided to say to his mother that all of the tips he received aggregated no more than a dollar a day. And, in order to give himself greater freedom of action in the matter of disposing of his spare time, he announced that frequently, in addition to the long hours demanded of him every other day, he was expected to take the place of other boys who were sick or set to doing other things. And also, he explained that the management demanded of all boys that they look well outside as well as inside the hotel. He could not long be seen coming to the hotel in the clothes that he now wore. Mr. Squires, he said, had hinted as much. But, as if to soften the blow, one of the boys at the hotel had told him of a place where he could procure quite all the things that he needed on time.

And so unsophisticated was his mother in these matters that she believed him.

But that was not all. He was now daily in contact with a type of youth who, because of his larger experience with the world and with the luxuries and vices of such a life as this, had already been inducted into certain forms of libertinism and vice even which up to this time were entirely foreign to Clyde's knowledge and set him agape with wonder and at first with even a timorous distaste. Thus, as Hegglund had pointed out, a certain percentage of this group, of which Clyde was now one, made common cause in connection with quite regular adventures which usually followed their monthly pay night. These ad-

ventures, according to their moods and their cash at the time, led them usually either to one of two rather famous and not too respectable all-night restaurants. In groups, as he gathered by degrees from hearing them talk, they were pleased to indulge in occasional late showy suppers with drinks, after which they were wont to go to either some flashy dance hall of the downtown section to pick up a girl, or that failing as a source of group interest, to visit some notorious—or as they would have deemed it reputed —brothel, very frequently camouflaged as a boarding house, where for much less than the amount of cash in their possession they could, as they often boasted, "have any girl in the house." And here, of course, because of their known youth, ignorance, liberality, and uniform geniality and good looks, they were made much of, as a rule, being made most welcome by the various madames and girls of these places who sought, for commercial reasons of course, to interest them to come again.

And so starved had been Clyde's life up to this time and so eager was he for almost any form of pleasure, that from the first he listened with all too eager ears to any account of anything that spelled adventure or pleasure. Not that he approved of these types of adventures. As a matter of fact at first it offended and depressed him, seeing as he did that it ran counter to all he had heard and been told to believe these many years. Nevertheless so sharp a change and relief from the dreary and repressed work in which he had been brought up was it, that he could not help thinking of all this with an itch for the variety and color it seemed to suggest. He listened sympathetically and eagerly, even while at times he was mentally disapproving of what he heard. And seeing him so sympathetic and genial, first one and then another of these youths made overtures to him to go here, there or the other place—to a show, a restaurant, one of their homes, where a card game might be indulged in by two or three of them, or even to one of the shameless houses, contact with which Clyde at first resolutely refused. But by degrees, becoming familiar with Hegglund and Ratterer, both of whom he liked very much, and being invited by them to a joy-night supper—a "blow-out" as they termed it, at Frissell's—he decided to go.

"There's going to be another one of our monthly blow-outs to-morrow night, Clyde, around at Frissell's," Ratterer had said to him. "Don't you want to come along? You haven't been yet."

By this time, Clyde, having acclimated himself to this caloric atmosphere, was by no means as dubious as he was at first. For

by now, in imitation of Doyle, whom he had studied most carefully and to great advantage, he had outfitted himself with a new brown suit, cap, overcoat, socks, stickpin and shoes as near like those of his mentor as possible. And the costume became him well—excellently well—so much so that he was far more attractive than he had ever been in his life, and now, not only his parents, but his younger brother and sister, were not a little astonished and even amazed by the change.

How could Clyde have come by all this grandeur so speedily? How much could all this that he wore now have cost? Was he not hypothecating more of his future earnings for this temporary grandeur than was really wise? He might need it in the future. The other children needed things, too. And was the moral and spiritual atmosphere of a place that made him work such long hours and kept him out so late every day, and for so little pay, just the place to work?

To all of which, he had replied, rather artfully for him, that it was all for the best, he was not working too hard. His clothes were not too fine, by any means—his mother should see some of the other boys. He was not spending too much money. And, anyhow, he had a long while in which to pay for all he had bought.

But now, as to this supper. That was a different matter, even to him. How, he asked himself, in case the thing lasted until very late as was expected, could he explain to his mother and father his remaining out so very late. Ratterer had said it might last until three or four, anyhow, although he might go, of course, any time. But how would that look, deserting the crowd? And yet hang it all, most of them did not live at home as he did, or if they did like Ratterer, they had parents who didn't mind what they did. Still, a late supper like that—was it wise? All these boys drank and thought nothing of it—Hegglund, Ratterer, Kinsella, Shiel. It must be silly for him to think that there was so much danger in drinking a little, as they did on these occasions. On the other hand it was true that he need not drink unless he wanted to. He could go, and if anything was said at home, he would say that he had to work late. What difference did it make if he stayed out late once in a while? Wasn't he a man now? Wasn't he making more money than any one else in the family? And couldn't he begin to do as he pleased?

He began to sense the delight of personal freedom—to sniff the air of personal and delicious romance—and he was not to be held back by any suggestion which his mother could now make.

CHAPTER IX

AND so the interesting dinner, with Clyde attending, came to pass. And it was partaken of at Frissell's, as Ratterer had said. And by now Clyde, having come to be on genial terms with all of these youths, was in the gayest of moods about it all. Think of his new state in life, anyhow. Only a few weeks ago he was all alone, not a boy friend, scarcely a boy acquaintance in the world! And here he was, so soon after, going to this fine dinner with this interesting group.

And true to the illusions of youth, the place appeared far more interesting than it really was. It was little more than an excellent chop-house of the older American order. Its walls were hung thick with signed pictures of actors and actresses, together with playbills of various periods. And because of the general excellence of the food, to say nothing of the geniality of its present manager, it had become the hangout of passing actors, politicians, local business men, and after them, the generality of followers who are always drawn by that which presents something a little different to that with which they are familiar.

And these boys, having heard at one time and another from cab and taxi drivers that this was one of the best places in town, fixed upon it for their monthly dinners. Single plates of anything cost from sixty cents to a dollar. Coffee and tea were served in pots only. You could get anything you wanted to drink. To the left of the main room as you went in was a darker and low-ceilinged room, with a fireplace, to which only men resorted and sat and smoked, and read papers after dinner, and it was for this room that these youths reserved their greatest admiration. Eating here, they somehow felt older, wiser, more important—real men of the world. And both Ratterer and Hegglund, to whom by now Clyde had become very much attached, as well as most of the others, were satisfied that there was not another place in all Kansas City that was really as good.

And so this day, having drawn their pay at noon, and being off at six for the night, they gathered outside the hotel at the corner nearest the drug store at which Clyde had originally applied for work, and were off in a happy, noisy frame of mind

—Hegglund, Ratterer, Paul Shiel, Davis Higby, another youth, Arthur Kinsella and Clyde.

"Didja hear de trick de guy from St. Louis pulled on de main office yesterday?" Hegglund inquired of the crowd generally, as they started walking. "Wires last Saturday from St. Louis for a parlor, bedroom and bat for himself and wife, an' orders flowers put in de room. Jimmy, the key clerk, was just tellin' me. Den he comes on here and registers himself an' his girl, see, as man and wife, an', gee, a peach of a lookin' girl, too—I saw 'em. Listen, you fellows, cantcha? Den, on Wednesday, after he's been here tree days and dey're beginnin' to wonder about him a little—meals sent to de room and all dat—he comes down and says dat his wife's gotta go back to St. Louis, and dat he won't need no suite, just one room, and dat dey can transfer his trunk and her bags to de new room until train time for her. But de trunk ain't his at all, see, but hers. And she ain't goin', don't know nuttin about it. But he is. Den he beats it, see, and leaves her and de trunk in de room. And widout a bean, see? Now, dey're holdin' her and her trunk, an' she's cryin' and wirin' friends, and dere's hell to pay all around. Can ya beat dat? An' de flowers, too. Roses. An' six different meals in de room and drinks for him, too."

"Sure, I know the one you mean," exclaimed Paul Shiel. "I took up some drinks myself. I felt there was something phony about that guy. He was too smooth and loud-talking. An' he only come across with a dime at that."

"I remember him, too," exclaimed Ratterer. "He sent me down for all the Chicago papers Monday an' only give me a dime. He looked like a bluff to me."

"Well, dey fell for him up in front, all right." It was Hegglund talking. "An' now dey're tryin' to gouge it outa her. Can you beat it?"

"She didn't look to me to be more than eighteen or twenty, if she's that old," put in Arthur Kinsella, who up to now had said nothing.

"Did you see either of 'em, Clyde?" inquired Ratterer, who was inclined to favor and foster Clyde and include him in everything.

"No," replied Clyde. "I must have missed those two. I don't remember seeing either of 'em."

"Well, you missed seein' a bird when you missed that one. Tall, long black cut-a-way coat, wide, black derby pulled low over his eyes, pearl-gray spats, too. I thought he was an English duke or something at first, the way he walked, and

with a cane, too. All they gotta do is pull that English stuff, an' talk loud an' order everybody about an' they git by with it every time."

"That's right," commented Davis Higby. "That's good stuff, that English line. I wouldn't mind pulling some of it myself sometime."

They had now turned two corners, crossed two different streets and, in group formation, were making their way through the main door of Frissell's, which gave in on the reflection of lights upon china and silverware and faces, and the buzz and clatter of a dinner crowd. Clyde was enormously impressed. Never before, apart from the Green-Davidson, had he been in such a place. And with such wise, experienced youths.

They made their way to a group of tables which faced a leather wall-seat. The head-waiter, recognizing Ratterer and Hegglund and Kinsella as old patrons, had two tables put together and butter and bread and glasses brought. About these they arranged themselves, Clyde with Ratterer and Higby occupying the wall-seat; Hegglund, Kinsella and Sheil sitting opposite.

"Now, me for a good old Manhattan, to begin wit'," exclaimed Hegglund avidly, looking about on the crowd in the room and feeling that now indeed he was a person. Of a reddish-tan hue, his eyes keen and blue, his reddish-brown hair brushed straight up from his forehead, he seemed not unlike a large and overzealous rooster.

And similarly, Arthur Kinsella, once he was in here, seemed to perk up and take heart of his present glory. In a sort of ostentatious way, he drew back his coat sleeves, seized a bill of fare, and scanning the drink-list on the back, exclaimed: "Well, a dry Martini is good enough for a start."

"Well, I'm going to begin with a Scotch and soda," observed Paul Sheil, solemnly, examining at the same time the meat orders.

"None of your cocktails for me to-night," insisted Ratterer, genially, but with a note of reserve in his voice. "I said I wasn't going to drink much to-night, and I'm not. I think a glass of Rhine wine and seltzer will be about my speed."

"For de love o' Mike, will you listen to dat, now," exclaimed Hegglund, deprecatingly. "He's goin' to begin on Rhine wine. And him dat likes Manhattans always. What's gettin' into you all of a sudden, Tommy? I tought you said you wanted a good time to-night."

"So I do," replied Ratterer, "but can't I have a good time

without lappin' up everything in the place? I want to stay sober to-night. No more call-downs for me in the morning, if I know what I'm about. I came pretty near not showing up last time."

"That's true, too," exclaimed Arthur Kinsella. "I don't want to drink so much I don't know where I'm at, but I'm not going to begin worrying about it now."

"How about you, Higby?" Hegglund now called to the round-eyed youth.

"I'm having a Manhattan, too," he replied, and then, looking up at the waiter who was beside him, added, "How's tricks, Dennis?"

"Oh, I can't complain," replied the waiter. "They're breakin' all right for me these days. How's everything over to the hotel?"

"Fine, fine," replied Higby, cheerfully, studying the bill-of-fare.

"An' you, Griffiths? What are you goin' to have?" called Hegglund, for, as master-of-ceremonies, delegated by the others to look after the orders and pay the bill and tip the waiter, he was now fulfilling the rôle.

"Who, me? Oh, me," exclaimed Clyde, not a little disturbed by this inquiry, for up to now—this very hour, in fact—he had never touched anything stronger than coffee or ice-cream soda. He had been not a little taken back by the brisk and sophisticated way in which these youths ordered cocktails and whisky. Surely he could not go so far as that, and yet, so well had he known long before this, from the conversation of these youths, that on such occasions as this they did drink, that he did not see how he could very well hold back. What would they think of him if he didn't drink something? For ever since he had been among them, he had been trying to appear as much of a man of the world as they were. And yet back of him, as he could plainly feel, lay all of the years in which he had been drilled in the "horrors" of drink and evil companionship. And even though in his heart this long while he had secretly rebelled against nearly all the texts and maxims to which his parents were always alluding, deeply resenting really as worthless and pointless the ragamuffin crew of wasters and failures whom they were always seeking to save, still, now he was inclined to think and hesitate. Should he or should he not drink?

For the fraction of an instant only, while all these things in him now spoke, he hesitated, then added: "Why, I, oh—I think I'll take Rhine wine and seltzer, too." It was the easiest

and safest thing to say, as he saw it. Already the rather temperate and even innocuous character of Rhine wine and seltzer had been emphasized by Hegglund and all the others. And yet Ratterer was taking it—a thing which made his choice less conspicuous and, as he felt, less ridiculous.

"Will you listen to dis now?" exclaimed Hegglund, dramatically. "He says he'll have Rhine wine and seltzer, too. I see where dis party breaks up at half-past eight, all right, unless some of de rest of us do someting."

And Davis Higby, who was far more trenchant and roistering than his pleasant exterior gave any indication of, turned to Ratterer and said: "Whatja want to start this Rhine wine and seltzer stuff for, so soon, Tom? Dontcha want us to have any fun at all to-night?"

"Well, I told you why," said Ratterer. "Besides, the last time I went down to that joint I had forty bucks when I went in and not a cent when I came out. I want to know what's goin' on this time."

"That joint," thought Clyde on hearing it. Then, after this supper, when they had all drunk and eaten enough, they were going down to one of those places called a "joint"—a bad-house, really. There was no doubt of it—he knew what the word meant. There would be women there—bad women—evil women. And he would be expected—could he—would he?

For the first time in his life now, he found himself confronted by a choice as to his desire for the more accurate knowledge of the one great fascinating mystery that had for so long confronted and fascinated and baffled and yet frightened him a little. For, despite all his many thoughts in regard to all this and women in general, he had never been in contact with any one of them in this way. And now—now—

All of a sudden he felt faint thrills of hot and cold racing up and down his back and all over him. His hands and face grew hot and then became moist—then his cheeks and forehead flamed. He could feel them. Strange, swift, enticing and yet disturbing thoughts raced in and out of his consciousness. His hair tingled and he saw pictures—bacchanalian scenes—which swiftly, and yet in vain, he sought to put out of his mind. They would keep coming back. And he wanted them to come back. Yet he did not. And through it all he was now a little afraid. Pshaw! Had he no courage at all? These other fellows were not disturbed by the prospects of what was before them. They were very gay. They were already beginning to laugh and kid one another in regard to certain funny things that had

happened the last time they were all out together. But what would his mother think if she knew? His mother! He dared not think of his mother or his father either at this time, and put them both resolutely out of his mind.

"Oh, say, Kinsella," called Higby. "Do you remember that little red head in that Pacific Street joint that wanted you to run away to Chicago with her?"

"Do I?" replied the amused Kinsella, taking up the Martini that was just then served him. "She even wanted me to quit the hotel game and let her start me in a business of some kind. 'I wouldn't need to work at all if I stuck by her,' she told me."

"Oh, no, you wouldn't need to work at all, except one way," called Ratterer.

The waiter put down Clyde's glass of Rhine wine and seltzer beside him and, interested and intense and troubled and fascinated by all that he heard, he picked it up, tasted it and, finding it mild and rather pleasing, drank it all down at once. And yet so wrought up were his thoughts that he scarcely realized then that he had drunk it.

"Good for you," observed Kinsella, in a most cordial tone. "You must like that stuff."

"Oh, it's not so bad," said Clyde.

And Hegglund, seeing how swiftly it had gone, and feeling that Clyde, new to this world and green, needed to be cheered and strengthened, called to the waiter: "Here, Jerry! One more of these, and make it a big one," he whispered behind his hand.

And so the dinner proceeded. And it was nearly eleven before they had exhausted the various matters of interest to them —stories of past affairs, past jobs, past feats of daring. And by then Clyde had had considerable time to meditate on all of these youths—and he was inclined to think that he was not nearly as green as they thought, or if so, at least shrewder than most of them—of a better mentality, really. For who were they and what were their ambitions? Hegglund, as he could see, was vain and noisy and foolish—a person who could be taken in and conciliated by a little flattery. And Higby and Kinsella, interesting and attractive boys both, were still vain of things he could not be proud of—Higby of knowing a little something about automobiles—he had an uncle in the business—Kinsella of gambling, rolling dice even. And as for Ratterer and Shiel, he could see and had noticed for some time, that they were content with the bell-hop business—just continuing in that and

nothing more—a thing which he could not believe, even now, would interest him forever.

At the same time, being confronted by this problem of how soon they would be wanting to go to a place into which he had never ventured before, and to be doing things which he had never let himself think he would do in just this way, he was just a little disturbed. Had he not better excuse himself after they got outside, or perhaps, after starting along with them in whatsoever direction they chose to go, quietly slip away at some corner and return to his own home? For had he not already heard that the most dreadful of diseases were occasionally contracted in just such places—and that men died miserable deaths later because of low vices begun in this fashion? He could hear his mother lecturing concerning all this—yet with scarcely any direct knowledge of any kind. And yet, as an argument per contra, here were all of these boys in nowise disturbed by what was in their minds or moods to do. On the contrary, they were very gay over it all and amused—nothing more.

In fact, Ratterer, who was really very fond of Clyde by now, more because of the way he looked and inquired and listened than because of anything Clyde did or said, kept nudging him with his elbow now and then, asking laughingly, "How about it, Clyde? Going to be initiated to-night?" and then smiling broadly. Or finding Clyde quite still and thinking at times, "They won't do more than bite you, Clyde."

And Hegglund, taking his cue from Ratterer and occasionally desisting from his own self-glorifying diatribes, would add: "You won't ever be de same, Clyde. Dey never are. But we'll all be wid you in case of trouble."

And Clyde, nervous and irritated, would retort: "Ah, cut it out, you two. Quit kidding. What's the use of trying to make out that you know so much more than I do?"

And Ratterer would signal Hegglund with his eyes to let up and would occasionally whisper to Clyde: "That's all right, old man, don't get sore. You know we were just fooling, that's all." And Clyde, very much drawn to Ratterer, would relent and wish he were not so foolish as to show what he actually was thinking about.

At last, however, by eleven o'clock, they had had their fill of conversation and food and drink and were ready to depart, Hegglund leading the way. And instead of the vulgar and secretive mission producing a kind of solemnity and mental or moral self-examination and self-flagellation, they laughed and talked as though there was nothing but a delicious form of amusement

before them. Indeed, much to Clyde's disgust and amazement, they now began to reminisce concerning other ventures into this world—of one particular one which seemed to amuse them all greatly, and which seemed to concern some "joint," as they called it, which they had once visited—a place called "Bettina's." They had been led there originally by a certain wild youth by the name of "Pinky" Jones of the staff of another local hotel. And this boy and one other by the name of Birmingham, together with Hegglund, who had become wildly intoxicated, had there indulged in wild pranks which all but led to their arrest—pranks which to Clyde, as he listened to them, seemed scarcely possible to boys of this caliber and cleanly appearance—pranks so crude and disgusting as to sicken him a little.

"Oh, ho, and de pitcher of water de girl on de second floor doused on me as I went out," called Hegglund, laughing heartily.

"And the big fat guy on the second floor that came to the door to see. Remember?" laughed Kinsella. "He thought there was a fire or a riot, I bet."

"And you and that little fat girl, Piggy. 'Member, Ratterer?" squealed Shiel, laughing and choking as he tried to tell of it.

"And Ratterer's legs all bent under his load. Yoo-hoo!" yelled Hegglund. "And de way de two of 'em finally slid down de steps."

"That was all your fault, Hegglund," called Higby from Kinsella's side. "If you hadn't tried that switching stuff we never woulda got put out."

"I tell you I was drunk," protested Ratterer. "It was the red-eye they sold in there."

"And that long, thin guy from Texas with the big mustache, will you ever forget him, an' the way he laughed?" added Kinsella. "He wouldn't help nobody 'gainst us. 'Member?"

"It's a wonder we weren't all thrown in the street or locked up. Oh, gee, what a night!" reminisced Ratterer.

By now Clyde was faintly dizzy with the nature of these revelations. "Switchin'." That could mean but one thing. And they expected him to share in revels such as these, maybe. It could not be. He was not that sort of person. What would his mother and father think if they were to hear of such dreadful things? And yet——

Even as they talked, they had reached a certain house in a dark and rather wide street, the curbs of which for a block or more on either side were sprinkled with cabs and cars. And at the corner, only a little distance away, were some young men

standing and talking. And over the way, more men. And not a half a block farther on, they passed two policemen, idling and conversing. And although there was no light visible in any window, nor over any transom, still, curiously, there was a sense of vivid, radiant life. One could feel it in this dark street. Taxis spun and honked and two old-time closed carriages still in use rolled here and there, their curtains drawn. And doors slammed or opened and closed. And now and then a segment of bright inward light pierced the outward gloom and then disappeared again. Overhead on this night were many stars.

Finally, without any comment from any one, Hegglund, accompanied by Higby and Sheil, marched up the steps of this house and rang the bell. Almost instantly the door was opened by a black girl in a red dress. "Good evening. Walk right in, won't you?" was the affable greeting, and the six, having pushed past her and through the curtains of heavy velvet, which separated this small area from the main chambers, Clyde found himself in a bright and rather gaudy general parlor or reception room, the walls of which were ornamented with gilt-framed pictures of nude or semi-nude girls and some very high pier mirrors. And the floor was covered by a bright red thick carpet, over which were strewn many gilt chairs. At the back, before some very bright red hangings, was a gilded upright piano. But of guests or inmates there seemed to be none, other than the black girl.

"Jest be seated, won't you? Make yourselves at home. I'll call the madam." And, running upstairs to the left, she began calling: "Oh, Marie! Sadie! Caroline! They is some young gentlemen in the parlor."

And at that moment, from a door in the rear, there emerged a tall, slim and rather pale-faced woman of about thirty-eight or forty—very erect, very executive, very intelligent and graceful-looking—diaphanously and yet modestly garbed, who said, with a rather wan and yet encouraging smile: "Oh, hello, Oscar, it's you, is it? And you too, Paul. Hello! Hello, Davis! Just make yourselves at home anywhere, all of you. Fannie will be in in a minute. She'll bring you something to drink. I've just hired a new pianist from St. Joe—a negro. Wait'll you hear him. He's awfully clever."

She returned to the rear and called, "Oh, Sam!"

As she did so, nine girls of varying ages and looks, but none apparently over twenty-four or five—came trooping down the stairs at one side in the rear, and garbed as Clyde had never seen any women dressed anywhere. And they were all laughing

and talking as they came—evidently very well pleased with themselves and in nowise ashamed of their appearance, which in some instances was quite extraordinary, as Clyde saw it, their costumes ranging from the gayest and flimsiest of boudoir negligées to the somewhat more sober, if no less revealing, dancing and ballroom gowns. And they were of such varied types and sizes and complexions—slim and stout and medium—tall or short—and dark or light or betwixt. And, whatever their ages, all seemed young. And they smiled so warmly and enthusiastically.

"Oh, hello, sweetheart! How are you? Don't you want to dance with me?" or "Wouldn't you like something to drink?"

CHAPTER X

PREPARED as Clyde was to dislike all this, so steeped had he been in moods and maxims antipathetic to anything of its kind, still so innately sensual and romantic was his own disposition and so starved where sex was concerned, that instead of being sickened, he was quite fascinated. The very fleshly sumptuousness of most of these figures, dull and unromantic as might be the brains that directed them, interested him for the time being. After all, here was beauty of a gross, fleshy character, revealed and purchasable. And there were no difficulties of mood or inhibitions to overcome in connection with any of these girls. One of them, a quite pretty brunette in a black and red costume, with a band of red ribbon across her forehead, seemed to be decidedly at home with Higby, for already she was dancing with him in the back room to a jazz melody most irrationally hammered out upon the piano.

And Ratterer, to Clyde's surprise, was already seated upon one of the gilt chairs and upon his knees was lounging a tall young girl with very light hair and blue eyes. And she was smoking a cigarette and tapping her gold slippers to the melody of the piano. It was really quite an amazing and Aladdin-like scene to him. And here was Hegglund, before whom was standing a German or Scandinavian type, plump and pretty, her arms akimbo and her feet wide apart. And she was asking—with an upward swell of the voice, as Clyde could hear: "You make love to me to-night?" But Hegglund, apparently not very much taken with these overtures, calmly shook his head, after which she went on to Kinsella.

And even as he was looking and thinking, a quite attractive blonde girl of not less than twenty-four, but who seemed younger to Clyde, drew up a chair beside him and seating herself, said: "Don't you dance?" He shook his head nervously. "Want me to show you?"

"Oh, I wouldn't want to try here," he said.

"Oh, it's easy," she continued. "Come on!" But since he would not, though he was rather pleased with her for being agreeable to him, she added: "Well, how about something to drink then?"

"Sure," he agreed, gallantly, and forthwith she signaled the young negress who had returned as waitress, and in a moment a small table was put before them and a bottle of whisky with soda on the side—a sight that so astonished and troubled Clyde that he could scarcely speak. He had forty dollars in his pocket, and the cost of drinks here, as he had heard from the others, would not be less than two dollars each, but even so, think of him buying drinks for such a woman at such a price! And his mother and sisters and brother at home with scarcely the means to make ends meet. And yet he bought and paid for several, feeling all the while that he had let himself in for a terrifying bit of extravagance, if not an orgy, but now that he was here, he must go through with it.

And besides, as he now saw, this girl was really pretty. She had on a Delft blue evening gown of velvet, with slippers and stockings to match. In her ears were blue earrings and her neck and shoulders and arms were plump and smooth. The most disturbing thing about her was that her bodice was cut very low—he dared scarcely look at her there—and her cheeks and lips were painted—most assuredly the marks of the scarlet woman. Yet she did not seem very aggressive, in fact quite human, and she kept looking rather interestedly at his deep and dark and nervous eyes.

"You work over at the Green-Davidson, too, don't you?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Clyde, trying to appear as if all this were not new to him—as if he had been often in just such a place as this, amid such scenes. "How did you know?"

"Oh, I know Oscar Hegglund," she replied. "He comes around here once in a while. Is he a friend of yours?"

"Yes. That is, he works over at the hotel with me."

"But you haven't been here before."

"No," said Clyde, swiftly, and yet with a trace of inquiry in his own mood. Why should she say he hadn't been here before?

"I thought you hadn't. I've seen most of these other boys before, but I never saw you. You haven't been working over at the hotel very long, have you?"

"No," said Clyde, a little irritated by this, his eyebrows and the skin of his forehead rising and falling as he talked—a form of contraction and expansion that went on involuntarily whenever he was nervous or thought deeply. "What of it?"

"Oh, nothing. I just knew you hadn't. You don't look very much like these other boys—you look different." She smiled

oddly and rather ingratiatingly, a smile and a mood which Clyde failed to interpret.

"How different?" he inquired, solemnly and contentiously, taking up a glass and drinking from it.

"I'll bet you one thing," she went on, ignoring his inquiry entirely. "You don't care for girls like me very much, do you?"

"Oh, yes, I do, too," he said, evasively.

"Oh, no, you don't either. I can tell. But I like you just the same. I like your eyes. You're not like those other fellows. You're more refined, kinda. I can tell. You don't look like them."

"Oh, I don't know," replied Clyde, very much pleased and flattered, his forehead wrinkling and clearing as before. This girl was certainly not as bad as he thought, maybe. She was more intelligent—a little more refined than the others. Her costume was not so gross. And she hadn't thrown herself upon him as had these others upon Hegglund, Higby, Kinsella and Ratterer. Nearly all of the group by now were seated upon chairs or divans about the room and upon their knees were girls. And in front of every couple was a little table with a bottle of whisky upon it.

"Look who's drinking whisky!" called Kinsella to such of the others as would pay any attention to him, glancing in Clyde's direction.

"Well, you needn't be afraid of me," went on the girl, while Clyde glanced at her arms and neck, at her too much revealed bosom, which quite chilled and yet enticed him. "I haven't been so very long in this business. And I wouldn't be here now if it hadn't been for all the bad luck I've had. I'd rather live at home with my family if I could, only they wouldn't have me, now." She looked rather solemnly at the floor, thinking mainly of the little inexperienced dunce Clyde was—so raw and green. Also of the money she had seen him take out of his pocket—plainly quite a sum. Also how really good-looking he was, not handsome or vigorous, but pleasing. And he was thinking at the instant of Esta, as to where she had gone or was now. What might have befallen her—who could say? What might have been done to her? Had this girl, by any chance, ever had any such unfortunate experience as she had had? He felt a growing, if somewhat grandiose, sympathy, and looked at her as much as to say: "You poor thing." Yet for the moment he would not trust himself to say anything or make any further inquiry.

"You fellows who come into a place like this always think

so hard of everybody. I know how you are. But we're not as bad as you think."

Clyde's brows knit and smoothed again. Perhaps she was not as bad as he thought. She was a low woman, no doubt—evil but pretty. In fact, as he looked about the room from time to time, none of the girls appealed to him more. And she thought him better than these other boys—more refined—she had detected that. The compliment stuck. Presently she was filling his glass for him and urging him to drink with her. Another group of young men arrived about then—and other girls coming out of the mysterious portals at the rear to greet them—Hegglund and Ratterer and Kinsella and Higby, as he saw, mysteriously disappeared up that back stairs that was heavily curtained from the general room. And as these others came in, this girl invited him to come and sit upon a divan in the back room where the lights were dimmer.

And now, seated here, she had drawn very close to him and touched his hands and finally linking an arm in his and pressing close to him, inquired if he didn't want to see how pretty some of the rooms on the second floor were furnished. And seeing that he was quite alone now—not one of all the group with whom he had come around to observe him—and that this girl seemed to lean to him warmly and sympathetically, he allowed himself to be led up that curtained back stair and into a small pink and blue furnished room, while he kept saying to himself that this was an outrageous and dangerous proceeding on his part, and that it might well end in misery for him. He might contract some dreadful disease. She might charge him more than he could afford. He was afraid of her—himself—everything, really—quite nervous and almost dumb with his several fears and qualms. And yet he went, and, the door locked behind him, this interestingly well-rounded and graceful Venus turned the moment they were within and held him to her, then calmly, and before a tall mirror which revealed her fully to herself and him, began to disrobe. . . .

CHAPTER XI

THE effect of this adventure on Clyde was such as might have been expected in connection with one so new and strange to such a world as this. In spite of all that deep and urgent curiosity and desire that had eventually led him to that place and caused him to yield, still, because of the moral precepts with which he had so long been familiar, and also because of the nervous esthetic inhibitions which were characteristic of him, he could not but look back upon all this as decidedly degrading and sinful. His parents were probably right when they preached that this was all low and shameful. And yet this whole adventure and the world in which it was laid, once it was all over, was lit with a kind of gross, pagan beauty or vulgar charm for him. And until other and more interesting things had partially effaced it, he could not help thinking back upon it with considerable interest and pleasure, even.

In addition he kept telling himself that now, having as much money as he was making, he could go and do about as he pleased. He need not go there any more if he did not want to, but he could go to other places that might not be as low, maybe—more refined. He wouldn't want to go with a crowd like that again. He would rather have just one girl somewhere if he could find her—a girl such as those with whom he had seen Sieberling and Doyle associate. And so, despite all of his troublesome thoughts of the night before, he was thus won quickly over to this new source of pleasure if not its primary setting. He must find a free pagan girl of his own somewhere if he could, like Doyle, and spend his money on her. And he could scarcely wait until opportunity should provide him with the means of gratifying himself in this way.

But more interesting and more to his purpose at the time was the fact that both Hegglund and Ratterer, in spite of, or possibly because of, a secret sense of superiority which they detected in Clyde, were inclined to look upon him with no little interest and to court him and to include him among all their thoughts of affairs and pleasures. Indeed, shortly after this first adventure, Ratterer invited him to come to his home, where, as Clyde most quickly came to see, was a life very different from his own. At the Griffiths all was so solemn and reserved, the still moods

of those who feel the pressure of dogma and conviction. In Ratterer's home, the reverse of this was nearly true. The mother and sister with whom he lived, while not without some moral although no particular religious convictions, were inclined to view life with a great deal of generosity or, as a moralist would have seen it, laxity. There had never been any keen moral or characterful direction there at all. And so it was that Ratterer and his sister Louise, who was two years younger than himself, now did about as they pleased, and without thinking very much about it. But his sister chanced to be shrewd or individual enough not to wish to cast herself away on just any one.

The interesting part of all this was that Clyde, in spite of a certain strain of refinement which caused him to look askance at most of this, was still fascinated by the crude picture of life and liberty which it offered. Among such as these, at least, he could go, do, be as he had never gone or done or been before. And particularly was he pleased and enlightened—or rather dubiously liberated—in connection with his nervousness and uncertainty in regard to his charm or fascination for girls of his own years. For up to this very time, and in spite of his recent first visit to the erotic temple to which Hegglund and the others had led him, he was still convinced that he had no skill with or charm where girls were concerned. Their mere proximity or approach was sufficient to cause him to recede mentally, to chill or palpitate nervously, and to lose what little natural skill he had for conversation or poised banter such as other youths possessed. But now, in his visits to the home of Ratterer, as he soon discovered, he was to have ample opportunity to test whether this shyness and uncertainty could be overcome.

For it was a center for the friends of Ratterer and his sister, who were more or less of one mood in regard to life. Dancing, card-playing, love-making rather open and unashamed, went on there. Indeed, up to this time, Clyde would not have imagined that a parent like Mrs. Ratterer could have been as lackadaisical or indifferent as she was, apparently, to conduct and morals generally. He would not have imagined that any mother would have countenanced the easy camaraderie that existed between the sexes in Mrs. Ratterer's home.

And very soon, because of several cordial invitations which were extended to him by Ratterer, he found himself part and parcel of this group—a group which from one point of view—the ideas held by its members, the rather wretched English they spoke—he looked down upon. From another point of view—the freedom they possessed, the zest with which they managed to con-

trive social activities and exchanges—he was drawn to them. Because, for the first time, these permitted him, if he chose, to have a girl of his own, if only he could summon the courage. And this, owing to the well-meant ministrations of Ratterer and his sister and their friends, he soon sought to accomplish. Indeed the thing began on the occasion of his first visit to the Ratterers.

Louise Ratterer worked in a dry-goods store and often came home a little late for dinner. On this occasion she did not appear until seven, and the eating of the family meal was postponed accordingly. In the meantime, two girl friends of Louise arrived to consult her in connection with something, and finding her delayed, and Ratterer and Clyde there, they made themselves at home, rather impressed and interested by Clyde and his new finery. For he, at once girl-hungry and girl-shy, held himself nervously aloof, a manifestation which they mistook for a conviction of superiority on his part. And in consequence, arrested by this, they determined to show how really interesting they were—vamp him—no less. And he found their crude briskness and effrontery very appealing—so much so that he was soon taken by the charms of one, a certain Hortense Briggs, who, like Louise, was nothing more than a crude shop girl in one of the large stores, but pretty and dark and self-appreciative. And yet from the first, he realized that she was not a little coarse and vulgar—a very long way removed from the type of girl he had been imagining in his dreams that he would like to have.

"Oh, hasn't she come in yet?" announced Hortense, on first being admitted by Ratterer and seeing Clyde near one of the front windows, looking out. "Isn't that too bad? Well, we'll just have to wait a little bit if you don't mind"—this last with a switch and a swagger that plainly said, who would mind having us around? And forthwith she began to primp and admire herself before a mirror which surmounted an ocher-colored mantelpiece that graced a fireless grate in the dining-room. And her friend, Greta Miller, added: "Oh, dear, yes. I hope you won't make us go before she comes. We didn't come to eat. We thought your dinner would be all over by now."

"Where do you get that stuff—'put you out'?" replied Ratterer cynically. "As though anybody could drive you two outa here if you didn't want to go. Sit down and play the victrola or do anything you like. Dinner'll soon be ready and Louise'll be here any minute." He returned to the dining-room to look at a paper which he had been reading, after pausing to introduce Clyde. And the latter, because of the looks and the airs of

these two, felt suddenly as though he had been cast adrift upon a chartless sea in an open boat.

"Oh, don't say eat to me!" exclaimed Greta Miller, who was surveying Clyde calmly as though she were debating with herself whether he was worth-while game or not, and deciding that he was: "With all the ice-cream and cake and pie and sandwiches we'll have to eat yet to-night. We was just going to warn Louise not to fill up too much. Kittie Keane's givin' a birthday party, you know, Tom, and she'll have a big cake an' everythin'. You're comin' down, ain't you, afterwards?" she concluded, with a thought of Clyde and his possible companionship in mind.

"I wasn't thinkin' of it," calmly observed Ratterer. "Me and Clyde was thinkin' of goin' to a show after dinner."

"Oh, how foolish," put in Hortense Briggs, more to attract attention to herself and take it away from Greta than anything else. She was still in front of the mirror, but turned now to cast a fetching smile on all, particularly Clyde, for whom she fancied her friend might be angling, "When you could come along and dance. I call that silly."

"Sure, dancing is all you three ever think of—you and Louise," retorted Ratterer. "It's a wonder you don't give yourselves a rest once in a while. I'm on my feet all day an' I like to sit down once in a while." He could be most matter-of-fact at times.

"Oh, don't say sit down to me," commented Greta Miller, with a lofty smile and a gliding, dancing motion of her left foot, "with all the dates we got ahead of us this week. Oh, gee!" Her eyes and eyebrows went up and she clasped her hands dramatically before her. "It's just terrible, all the dancin' we gotta do yet this winter, don't we, Hortense? Thursday night and Friday night and Saturday and Sunday nights." She counted on her fingers most archly. "Oh, gee! It is terrible, really." She gave Clyde an appealing, sympathy-seeking smile. "Guess where we were the other night, Tom. Louise and Ralph Thorpe and Hortense and Bert Gettler, me and Willie Bassick—out to Pegrain's on Webster Avenue. Oh, an' you oughta seen the crowd out there. Sam Shaffer and Tillie Burns was there. And we danced until four in the morning. I thought my knees would break. I ain't been so tired in I don't know when."

"Oh, gee!" broke in Hortense, seizing her turn and lifting her arms dramatically. "I thought I never would get to work the next morning. I could just barely see the customers moving around. And, wasn't my mother fussy! Gee! She hasn't gotten

over it yet. She don't mind so much about Saturdays and Sundays, but all these week nights and when I have to get up the next morning at seven—gee—how she can pick!"

"An' I don't blame her, either," commented Mrs. Ratterer, who was just then entering with a plate of potatoes and some bread. "You two'll get sick and Louise, too, if you don't get more rest. I keep tellin' her she won't be able to keep her place or stand it if she don't get more sleep. But she don't pay no more attention to me than Tom does, and that's just none at all."

"Oh, well, you can't expect a fellow in my line to get in early, always, Ma," was all Ratterer said. And Hortense Briggs added: "Gee, I'd die if I had to stay in one night. You gotta have a little fun when you work all day."

What an easy household, thought Clyde. How liberal and indifferent. And the sexy, gay way in which these two girls posed about. And their parents thought nothing of it, evidently. If only he could have a girl as pretty as this Hortense Briggs, with her small, sensuous mouth and her bright hard eyes.

"To bed twice a week early is all I need," announced Greta Miller archly. "My father thinks I'm crazy, but more'n that would do me harm." She laughed jestingly, and Clyde, in spite of the "we was'es" and "I seen's," was most vividly impressed. Here was youth and geniality and freedom and love of life.

And just then the front door opened and in hurried Louise Ratterer, a medium-sized, trim, vigorous little girl in a red-lined cape and a soft blue felt hat pulled over her eyes. Unlike her brother, she was brisk and vigorous and more lithe and as pretty as either of these others.

"Oh, look who's here!" she exclaimed. "You two birds beat me home, didnja? Well, I got stuck to-night on account of some mix-up in my sales-book. And I had to go up to the cashier's office. You bet it wasn't my fault, though. They got my writin' wrong," then noting Clyde for the first time, she announced: "I bet I know who this is—Mr. Griffiths. Tom's talked about you a lot. I wondered why he didn't bring you around here before." And Clyde, very much flattered, mumbled that he wished he had.

But the two visitors, after conferring with Louise in a small front bedroom to which they all retired, reappeared presently and because of strenuous invitations, which were really not needed, decided to remain. And Clyde, because of their presence, was now intensely wrought up and alert—eager to make a pleasing impression and to be received upon terms of friendship here. And these three girls, finding him attractive, were anxious

to be agreeable to him, so much so that for the first time in his life they put him at his ease with the opposite sex and caused him to find his tongue.

"We was just going to warn you not to eat so much," laughed Greta Miller, turning to Louise, "and now, see, we are all trying to eat again." She laughed heartily. "And they'll have pies and cakes and everythin' at Kittie's."

"Oh, gee, and we're supposed to dance, too, on top of all this. Well, heaven help me, is all I have to say," put in Hortense.

The peculiar sweetness of her mouth, as he saw it, as well as the way she crinkled it when she smiled, caused Clyde to be quite beside himself with admiration and pleasure. She looked quite delightful—wonderful to him. Indeed her effect on him made him swallow quickly and half choke on the coffee he had just taken. He laughed and felt irrepressibly gay.

At that moment she turned on him and said: "See, what I've done to him now."

"Oh, that ain't all you've done to me," exclaimed Clyde, suddenly being seized with an inspiration and a flow of thought and courage. Of a sudden, because of her effect on him, he felt bold and courageous, albeit a little foolish and added, "Say, I'm gettin' kinda woozy with all the pretty faces I see around here."

"Oh, gee, you don't want to give yourself away that quick around here, Clyde," cautioned Ratterer, genially. "These high-binders'll be after you to make you take 'em wherever they want to go. You better not begin that way." And, sure enough, Louise Ratterer, not to be abashed by what her brother had just said, observed: "You dance, don't you, Mr. Griffiths?"

"No, I don't," replied Clyde, suddenly brought back to reality by this inquiry and regretting most violently the handicap this was likely to prove in this group. "But you bet I wish I did now," he added gallantly and almost appealingly, looking first at Hortense and then at Greta Miller and Louise. But all pretended not to notice his preference, although Hortense titillated with her triumph. She was not convinced that she was so greatly taken with him, but it was something to triumph thus easily and handsomely over these others. And the others felt it. "Ain't that too bad?" she commented, a little indifferently and superiorly now that she realized that she was his preference. "You might come along with us, you and Tom, if you did. There's goin' to be mostly dancing at Kittie's."

Clyde began to feel and look crushed at once. To think that this girl, to whom of all those here he was most drawn, could dismiss him and his dreams and desires thus easily, and all because

he couldn't dance. And his accursed home training was responsible for all this. He felt broken and cheated. What a boob he must seem not to be able to dance. And Louise Ratterer looked a little puzzled and indifferent, too. But Greta Miller, whom he liked less than Hortense, came to his rescue with: "Oh, it ain't so hard to learn. I could show you in a few minutes after dinner if you wanted to. It's only a few steps you have to know. And then you could go, anyhow, if you wanted to."

Clyde was grateful and said so—determined to learn here or elsewhere at the first opportunity. Why hadn't he gone to a dancing school before this, he asked himself. But the thing that pained him most was the seeming indifference of Hortense now that he had made it clear that he liked her. Perhaps it was that Bert Gettler, previously mentioned, with whom she had gone to the dance, who was making it impossible for him to interest her. So he was always to be a failure this way. Oh, gee!

But the moment the dinner was over and while the others were still talking, the first to put on a dance record and come over with hands extended was Hortense, who was determined not to be outdone by her rival in this way. She was not particularly interested or fascinated by Clyde, at least not to the extent of troubling about him as Greta did. But if her friend was going to attempt a conquest in this manner, was it not just as well to forestall her? And so, while Clyde misread her change of attitude to the extent of thinking that she liked him better than he had thought, she took him by the hands, thinking at the same time that he was too bashful. However, placing his right arm about her waist, his other clasped in hers at her shoulder, she directed his attention to her feet and his and began to illustrate the few primary movements of the dance. But so eager and grateful was he—almost intense and ridiculous—she did not like him very much, thought him a little unsophisticated and too young. At the same time, there was a charm about him which caused her to wish to assist him. And soon he was moving about with her quite easily—and afterwards with Greta and then Louise, but wishing always it was Hortense. And finally he was pronounced sufficiently skillful to go, if he would.

And now the thought of being near her, being able to dance with her again, drew him so greatly that, despite the fact that three youths, among them that same Bert Gettler, appeared on the scene to escort them, and although he and Ratterer had

previously agreed to go to a theater together, he could not help showing how much he would prefer to follow these others—so much so that Ratterer finally agreed to abandon the theater idea. And soon they were off, Clyde grieving that he could not walk with Hortense, who was with Gettler, and hating his rival because of this; but still attempting to be civil to Louise and Greta, who bestowed sufficient attention on him to make him feel at ease. Ratterer, having noticed his extreme preference and being alone with him for a moment, said: "You better not get too stuck on that Hortense Briggs. I don't think she's on the level with anybody. She's got that fellow Gettler and others. She'll only work you an' you might not get anything, either."

But Clyde, in spite of this honest and well-meant caution, was not to be dissuaded. On sight, and because of the witchery of a smile, the magic and vigor of motion and youth, he was completely infatuated and would have given or done anything for an additional smile or glance or hand pressure. And that despite the fact that he was dealing with a girl who no more knew her own mind than a moth, and who was just reaching the stage where she was finding it convenient and profitable to use boys of her own years or a little older for whatever pleasures or clothes she desired.

The party proved nothing more than one of those ebullitions of the youthful mating period. The house of Kittie Keane was little more than a cottage in a poor street under bare December trees. But to Clyde, because of the passion for a pretty face that was suddenly lit in him, it had the color and the form and gayety of romance itself. And the young girls and boys that he met there—girls and boys of the Ratterer, Hegglund, Hortense stripe—were still of the very substance and texture of that energy, ease and forwardness which he would have given his soul to possess. And curiously enough, in spite of a certain nervousness on his part, he was by reason of his new companions made an integral part of the gayeties.

And on this occasion, he was destined to view a type of girl and youth in action such as previously it had not been his fortune or misfortune, as you will, to see. There was, for instance, a type of sensual dancing which Louise and Hortense and Greta indulged in with the greatest nonchalance and assurance. At the same time, many of these youths carried whisky in a hip flask, from which they not only drank themselves, but gave others to drink—boys and girls indiscriminately.

And the general hilarity for this reason being not a little added

to, they fell into more intimate relations—spooning with one and another—Hortense and Louise and Greta included. Also to quarreling at times. And it appeared to be nothing out of the ordinary, as Clyde saw, for one youth or another to embrace a girl behind a door, to hold her on his lap in a chair in some secluded corner, to lie with her on a sofa, whispering intimate and unquestionably welcome things to her. And although at no time did he espy Hortense doing this—still, as he saw, she did not hesitate to sit on the laps of various boys or to whisper with rivals behind doors. And this for a time so discouraged and at the same time incensed him that he felt he could not and would not have anything more to do with her—she was too cheap, vulgar, inconsiderate.

At the same time, having partaken of the various drinks offered him—so as not to seem less worldly wise than the others—until brought to a state of courage and daring not ordinarily characteristic of him, he ventured to half plead with and at the same time half reproach her for her too lax conduct.

"You're a flirt, you are. You don't care who you jolly, do you?" This as they were dancing together after one o'clock to the music of a youth named Wilkens, at the none too toneful piano. She was attempting to show him a new step in a genial and yet coquettish way, and with an amused, sensuous look.

"What do you mean, flirt? I don't get you."

"Oh, don't you?" replied Clyde, a little crossly and still attempting to conceal his real mood by a deceptive smile. "I've heard about you. You jolly 'em all."

"Oh, do I?" she replied quite irritably. "Well, I haven't tried to jolly you very much, have I?"

"Well, now, don't get mad," he half pleaded and half scolded, fearing, perhaps, that he had ventured too far and might lose her entirely now. "I don't mean anything by it. You don't deny that you let a lot of these fellows make love to you. They seem to like you, anyway."

"Oh, well, of course they like me, I guess. I can't help that, can I?"

"Well, I'll tell you one thing," he blurted boastfully and passionately. "I could spend a lot more on you than they could. I got it." He had been thinking only the moment before of fifty-five dollars in bills that snuggled comfortably in his pocket.

"Oh, I don't know," she retorted, not a little intrigued by this cash offer, as it were, and at the same time not a little set up in her mood by the fact that she could thus inflame nearly all youths in this way. She was really a little silly, very light-

headed, who was infatuated by her own charms and looked in every mirror, admiring her eyes, her hair, her neck, her hands, her figure, and practising a peculiarly fetching smile.

At the same time, she was not unaffected by the fact that Clyde was not a little attractive to look upon, although so very green. She liked to tease such beginners. He was a bit of a fool, as she saw him. But he was connected with the Green-Davidson, and he was well-dressed, and no doubt he had all the money he said and would spend it on her. Some of those whom she liked best did not have much money to spend.

"Lots of fellows with money would like to spend it on me." She tossed her head and flicked her eyes and repeated her coyest smile.

At once Clyde's countenance darkened. The witchery of her look was too much for him. The skin of his forehead crinkled and then smoothed out. His eyes burned lustfully and bitterly, his old resentment of life and deprivation showing. No doubt all she said was true. There were others who had more and would spend more. He was boasting and being ridiculous and she was laughing at him.

After a moment, he added, weakly, "I guess that's right, too. But they couldn't want you more than I do."

The uncalculated honesty of it flattered her not a little. He wasn't so bad after all. They were gracefully gliding about as the music continued.

"Oh, well, I don't flirt everywhere like I do here. These fellows and girls all know each other. We're always going around together. You mustn't mind what you see here."

She was lying artfully, but it was soothing to him none the less. "Gee, I'd give anything if you'd only be nice to me," he pleaded, desperately and yet ecstatically. "I never saw a girl I'd rather have than you. You're swell. I'm crazy about you. Why won't you come out to dinner with me and let me take you to a show afterwards? Don't you want to do that, to-morrow night or Sunday? Those are my two nights off. I work other nights."

She hesitated at first, for even now she was not so sure that she wished to continue this contact. There was Gettler, to say nothing of several others, all jealous and attentive. Even though he spent money on her, she might not wish to bother with him. He was already too eager and he might become troublesome. At the same time, the natural coquetry of her nature would not permit her to relinquish him. He might fall into the hands of Greta or Louise. In consequence she finally arranged a meeting

for the following Tuesday. But he could not come to the house, or take her home to-night—on account of her escort, Mr. Gettler. But on the following Tuesday, at six-thirty, near the Green-Davidson. And he assured her that they would dine first at Frissell's, and then see "The Corsair," a musical comedy at Libby's, only two blocks away.

CHAPTER XII

NOW trivial as this contact may seem to some, it was of the utmost significance to Clyde. Up to this he had never seen a girl with so much charm who would deign to look at him, or so he imagined. And now he had found one, and she was pretty and actually interested sufficiently to accompany him to dinner and to a show. It was true, perhaps, that she was a flirt, and not really sincere with any one, and that maybe at first he could not expect her to center her attentions on him, but who knew—who could tell?

And true to her promise on the following Tuesday she met him at the corner of 14th Street and Wyandotte, near the Green-Davidson. And so excited and flattered and enraptured was he that he could scarcely arrange his jumbled thoughts and emotions in any seemly way. But to show that he was worthy of her, he had made an almost exotic toilet—hair pomaded, a butterfly tie, new silk muffler and silk socks to emphasize his bright brown shoes, purchased especially for the occasion.

But once he had reëncountered Hortense, whether all this was of any import to her he could not tell. For, after all, it was her own appearance, not his, that interested her. And what was more—a trick with her—she chose to keep him waiting until nearly seven o'clock, a delay which brought about in him the deepest dejection of spirit for the time being. For supposing, after all, in the interval, she had decided that she did not care for him and did not wish to see him any more. Well, then he would have to do without her, of course. But that would prove that he was not interesting to a girl as pretty as she was, despite all the nice clothes he was now able to wear and the money he could spend. He was determined that, girl or no girl, he would not have one who was not pretty. Ratterer and Hegglund did not seem to mind whether the girl they knew was attractive or not, but with him it was a passion. The thought of being content with one not so attractive almost nauseated him.

And yet here he was now, on the street corner in the dark—the flare of many signs and lights about, hundreds of pedestrians hurrying hither and thither, the thought of pleasurable intentions and engagements written upon the faces of many—and he, he

alone, might have to turn and go somewhere else—eat alone, go to a theater alone, go home alone, and then to work again in the morning. He had just about concluded that he was a failure when out of the crowd, a little distance away, emerged the face and figure of Hortense. She was smartly dressed in a black velvet jacket with a reddish brown collar and cuffs, and a bulgy, round tam of the same material with a red leather buckle on the side. And her cheeks and lips were rouged a little. And her eyes sparkled. And as usual she gave herself all the airs of one very well content with herself.

"Oh, hello, I'm late, ain't I? I couldn't help it. You see, I forgot I had another appointment with a fella, a friend of mine—gee, a peach of a boy, too, and it was only at six I remembered that I had the two dates. Well, I was in a mess then. So I had to do something about one of you. I was just about to call you up and make a date for another night, only I remembered you wouldn't be at your place after six. Tom never is. And Charlie always is in his place till six-thirty, anyhow, sometimes later, and he's a peach of a fella that way—never grouchy or nothing. And he was goin' to take me to the theater and to dinner, too. He has charge of the cigar stand over here at the Orphia. So I called him up. Well, he didn't like it so very much. But I told him I'd make it another night. Now, aintcha glad? Dontcha think I'm pretty nice to you, disappointin' a good-lookin' fella like Charlie for you?"

She had caught a glimpse of the disturbed and jealous and yet fearsome look in Clyde's eyes as she talked of another. And the thought of making him jealous was a delight to her. She realized that he was very much smitten with her. So she tossed her head and smiled, falling into step with him as he moved up the street.

"You bet it was nice of you to come," he forced himself to say, even though the reference to Charlie as a "peach of a fella" seemed to affect his throat and his heart at the same time. What chance had he to hold a girl who was so pretty and self-willed? "Gee, you look swell to-night," he went on, forcing himself to talk and surprising himself a little with his ability to do so. "I like the way that hat looks on you, and your coat too." He looked directly at her, his eyes lit with admiration, an eager yearning filling them. He would have liked to have kissed her —her pretty mouth—only he did not dare here, or anywhere as yet.

"I don't wonder you have to turn down engagements. You're pretty enough. Don't you want some roses to wear?" They

were passing a flower store at the moment and the sight of them put the thought of the gift in his mind. He had heard Hegglund say that women liked fellows who did things for them.

"Oh, sure, I would like some roses," she replied, turning into the place. "Or maybe some of those violets. They look pretty. They go better with this jacket, I think."

She was pleased to think that Clyde was sporty enough to think of flowers. Also that he was saying such nice things about her. At the same time she was convinced that he was a boy who had had little, if anything, to do with girls. And she preferred youths and men who were more experienced, not so easily flattered by her—not so easy to hold. Yet she could not help thinking that Clyde was a better type of boy or man than she was accustomed to—more refined. And for that reason, in spite of his gaucheness (in her eyes) she was inclined to tolerate him —to see how he would do.

"Well, these are pretty nifty," she exclaimed, picking up a rather large bouquet of violets and pinning them on. "I think I'll wear these." And while Clyde paid for them, she posed before the mirror, adjusting them to her taste. At last, being satisfied as to their effect, she turned and exclaimed, "Well, I'm ready," and took him by the arm.

Clyde, being not a little overawed by her spirit and mannerisms, was at a loss what else to say for the moment, but he need not have worried—her chief interest in life was herself.

"Gee, I tell you I had a swift week of it last week. Out every night until three. An' Sunday until nearly morning. My, that was some rough party I was to last night, all right. Ever been down to Burkett's at Gifford's Ferry? Oh, a nifty place, all right, right over the Big Blue at 39th. Dancing in summer and you can skate outside when it's frozen in winter or dance on the ice. An' the niftiest little orchestra."

Clyde watched the play of her mouth and the brightness of her eyes and the swiftness of her gestures without thinking so much of what she said—very little.

"Wallace Trone was along with us—gee, he's a scream of a kid—and afterwards when we was sittin' down to eat ice cream, he went out in the kitchen and blacked up an' put on a waiter's apron and coat and then comes back and serves us. That's one funny boy. An' he did all sorts of funny stuff with the dishes and spoons." Clyde sighed because he was by no means as gifted as the gifted Trone.

"An' then, Monday morning, when we all got back it was nearly four, and I had to get up again at seven. I was all in.

I coulda chucked my job, and I woulda, only for the nice people down at the store and Mr. Beck. He's the head of my department, you know, and say, how I do plague that poor man. I sure am hard on that store. One day I comes in late after lunch; one of the other girls punched the clock for me with my key, see, and he was out in the hall and he saw her, and he says to me afterwards, about two in the afternoon, 'Say look here, Miss Briggs' (he always calls me Miss Briggs, 'cause I won't let him call me nothing else. He'd try to get fresh if I did), 'that loanin' that key stuff don't go. Cut that stuff out now. This ain't no Follies.' I had to laugh. He does get so sore at times at all of us. But I put him in his place just the same. He's kinda soft on me, you know—he wouldn't fire me for worlds, not him. So I says to him, 'See here, Mr. Beck, you can't talk to me in any such style as that. I'm not in the habit of comin' late often. An' wot's more, this ain't the only place I can work in K.C. If I can't be late once in a while without hearin' about it, you can just send up for my time, that's all, see.' I wasn't goin' to let him get away with that stuff. And just as I thought, he weakened. All he says was, 'Well, just the same, I'm warnin' you. Next time maybe Mr. Tierney'll see you an' then you'll get a chance to try some other store, all right.' He knew he was bluffing and that I did, too. I had to laugh. An' I saw him laughin' with Mr. Scott about two minutes later. But, gee, I certainly do pull some raw stuff around there at times."

By then she and Clyde, with scarcely a word on his part, and much to his ease and relief, had reached Frissell's. And for the first time in his life he had the satisfaction of escorting a girl to a table in such a place. Now he really was beginning to have a few experiences worthy of the name. He was quite on edge with the romance of it. Because of her very high estimate of herself, her very emphatic picture of herself as one who was intimate with so many youths and girls who were having a good time, he felt that up to this hour he had not lived at all. Swiftly he thought of the different things she had told him—Burkett's on the Big Blue, skating and dancing on the ice—Charlie Trone—the young tobacco clerk with whom she had had the engagement for to-night—Mr. Beck at the store who was so struck on her that he couldn't bring himself to fire her. And as he saw her order whatever she liked, without any thought of his purse, he contemplated quickly her face, figure, the shape of her hands, so suggestive always of the delicacy or roundness of the arm, the swell of her bust, already very pronounced, the curve

of her eyebrows, the rounded appeal of her smooth cheeks and chin. There was something also about the tone of her voice, unctuous, smooth, which somehow appealed to and disturbed him. To him it was delicious. Gee, if he could only have such a girl all for himself!

And in here, as without, she clattered on about herself, not at all impressed, apparently, by the fact that she was dining here, a place that to him had seemed quite remarkable. When she was not looking at herself in a mirror, she was studying the bill of fare and deciding what she liked—lamb with mint jelly—no omelette, no beef—oh, yes, filet of mignon with mushrooms. She finally compromised on that with celery and cauliflower. And she would like a cocktail. Oh, yes, Clyde had heard Hegglund say that no meal was worth anything without a few drinks, so now he had mildly suggested a cocktail. And having secured that and a second, she seemed warmer and gayer and more gossipy than ever.

But all the while, as Clyde noticed, her attitude in so far as he was concerned was rather distant—impersonal. If for so much as a moment, he ventured to veer the conversation ever so slightly to themselves, his deep personal interest in her, whether she was really very deeply concerned about any other youth, she threw him off by announcing that she liked all the boys, really. They were all so lovely—so nice to her. They had to be. When they weren't, she didn't have anything more to do with them. She "tied a can to them," as she once expressed it. Her quick eyes clicked and she tossed her head defiantly.

And Clyde was captivated by all this. Her gestures, her poses, moues and attitudes were sensuous and suggestive. She seemed to like to tease, promise, lay herself open to certain charges and conclusions and then to withhold and pretend that there was nothing to all of this—that she was very unconscious of anything save the most reserved thoughts in regard to herself. In the main, Clyde was thrilled and nourished by this mere proximity to her. It was torture, and yet a sweet kind of torture. He was full of the most tantalizing thoughts about how wonderful it would be if only he were permitted to hold her close, kiss her mouth, bite her, even. To cover her mouth with his! To smother her with kisses! To crush and pet her pretty figure! She would look at him at moments with deliberate, swimming eyes, and he actually felt a little sick and weak—almost nauseated. His one dream was that by some process, either of charm or money, he could make himself interesting to her.

And yet after going with her to the theater and taking her home again, he could not see that he had made any noticeable progress. For throughout the performance of "The Corsair" at Libby's, Hortense, who, because of her uncertain interest in him was really interested in the play, talked of nothing but similar shows she had seen, as well as of actors and actresses and what she thought of them, and what particular youth had taken her. And Clyde, instead of leading her in wit and defiance and matching her experiences with his own, was compelled to content himself with approving of her.

And all the time she was thinking that she had made another real conquest. And because she was no longer virtuous, and she was convinced that he had some little money to spend, and could be made to spend it on her, she conceived the notion of being sufficiently agreeable—nothing more—to hold him, keep him attentive, if possible, while at the same time she went her own way, enjoying herself as much as possible with others and getting Clyde to buy and do such things for her as might fill gaps—when she was not sufficiently or amusingly enough engaged elsewhere.

CHAPTER XIII

FOR a period of four months at least this was exactly the way it worked out. After meeting her in this fashion, he was devoting not an inconsiderable portion of his free time to attempting to interest her to the point where she would take as much interest in him as she appeared to take in others. At the same time he could not tell whether she could be made to entertain a singular affection for any one. Nor could he believe that there was only an innocent camaraderie involved in all this. Yet she was so enticing that he was deliriously moved by the thought that if his worst suspicions were true, she might ultimately favor him. So captivated was he by this savor of sensuality and varietism that was about her, the stigmata of desire manifest in her gestures, moods, voice, the way she dressed, that he could not think of relinquishing her.

Rather, he foolishly ran after her. And seeing this, she put him off, at times evaded him, compelled him to content himself with little more than the crumbs of her company, while at the same time favoring him with descriptions or pictures of other activities and contacts which made him feel as though he could no longer endure to merely trail her in this fashion. It was then he would announce to himself in anger that he was not going to see her any more. She was no good to him, really. But on seeing her again, a cold indifference in everything she said and did, his courage failed him and he could not think of severing the tie.

She was not at all backward at the same time in speaking of things that she needed or would like to have—little things, at first—a new powder puff, a lip stick, a box of powder or a bottle of perfume. Later, and without having yielded anything more to Clyde than a few elusive and evasive endearments—intimate and languorous reclinings in his arms which promised much but always came to nothing—she made so bold as to indicate to him at different times and in different ways, purses, blouses, slippers, stockings, a hat, which she would like to buy if only she had the money. And he, in order to hold her favor and properly ingratiate himself, proceeded to buy them, though at times and because of some other developments in connection with

his family, it pressed him hard to do so. And yet, as he was beginning to see toward the end of the fourth month, he was apparently little farther advanced in her favor than he had been in the beginning. In short, he was conducting a feverish and almost painful pursuit without any definite promise of reward.

In the meantime, in so far as his home ties went, the irritations and the depressions which were almost inextricably involved with membership in the Griffiths family were not different from what they had ever been. For, following the disappearance of Esta, there had settled a period of dejection which still endured. Only, in so far as Clyde was concerned, it was complicated with a mystery which was tantalizing and something more—irritating; for when it came to anything which related to sex in the Griffiths family, no parents could possibly have been more squeamish.

And especially did this apply to the mystery which had now surrounded Esta for some time. She had gone. She had not returned. And so far as Clyde and the others knew, no word of any kind had been received from her. However, Clyde had noted that after the first few weeks of her absence, during which time both his mother and father had been most intensely wrought up and troubled, worrying greatly as to her whereabouts and why she did not write, suddenly they had ceased their worries, and had become very much more resigned—at least not so tortured by a situation that previously had seemed to offer no hope whatsoever. He could not explain it. It was quite noticeable, and yet nothing was said. And then one day a little later, Clyde had occasion to note that his mother was in communication with some one by mail—something rare for her. For so few were her social or business connections that she rarely received or wrote a letter.

One day, however, very shortly after he had connected himself with the Green-Davidson, he had come in rather earlier than usual in the afternoon and found his mother bending over a letter which evidently had just arrived and which appeared to interest her greatly. Also it seemed to be connected with something which required concealment. For, on seeing him, she stopped reading at once, and, flustered and apparently nervous, arose and put the letter away without commenting in any way upon what she had been reading. But Clyde for some reason, intuition perhaps, had the thought that it might be from Esta. He was not sure. And he was too far away to detect the character of the handwriting. But whatever it was, his mother said nothing afterwards concerning it. She looked as though she did

not want him to inquire, and so reserved were their relations that he would not have thought of inquiring. He merely wondered, and then dismissed it partially, but not entirely, from his mind.

A month or five weeks after this, and just about the time that he was becoming comparatively well-schooled in his work at the Green-Davidson, and was beginning to interest himself in Hortense Briggs, his mother came to him one afternoon with a very peculiar proposition for her. Without explaining what it was for, or indicating directly that now she felt that he might be in a better position to help her, she called him into the mission hall when he came in from work and, looking at him rather fixedly and nervously for her, said: "You wouldn't know, Clyde, would you, how I could raise a hundred dollars right away?"

Clyde was so astonished that he could scarcely believe his ears, for only a few weeks before the mere mention of any sum above four or five dollars in connection with him would have been preposterous. His mother knew that. Yet here she was asking him and apparently assuming that he might be able to assist her in this way. And rightly, for both his clothes and his general air had indicated a period of better days for him.

At the same time his first thought was, of course, that she had observed his clothes and goings-on and was convinced that he was deceiving her about the amount he earned. And in part this was true, only so changed was Clyde's manner of late, that his mother had been compelled to take a very different attitude toward him and was beginning to be not a little dubious as to her further control over him. Recently, or since he had secured this latest place, for some reason he had seemed to her to have grown wiser, more assured, less dubious of himself, inclined to go his own way and keep his own counsel. And while this had troubled her not a little in one sense, it rather pleased her in another. For to see Clyde, who had always seemed because of his sensitiveness and unrest so much of a problem to her, developing in this very interesting way was something; though at times, and in view of his very recent finery, she had been wondering and troubled as to the nature of the company he might be keeping. But since his hours were so long and so absorbing, and whatever money he made appeared to be going into clothes, she felt that she had no real reason to complain. Her one other thought was that perhaps he was beginning to act a little selfish—to think too much of his own comfort—and yet in the face of his long deprivations she could not very well begrudge him any temporary pleasure, either.

Clyde, not being sure of her real attitude, merely looked at her and exclaimed: "Why, where would I get a hundred dollars, Ma?" He had visions of his new-found source of wealth being dissipated by such unheard of and inexplicable demands as this, and distress and distrust at once showed on his countenance.

"I didn't expect that you could get it all for me," Mrs. Griffiths suggested tactfully. "I have a plan to raise the most of it, I think. But I did want you to help me try to think how I would raise the rest. I didn't want to go to your father with this if I could help it, and you're getting old enough now to be of some help." She looked at Clyde approvingly and interestedly enough. "Your father is such a poor hand at business," she went on, "and he gets so worried at times."

She passed a large and weary hand over her face and Clyde was moved by her predicament, whatever it was. At the same time, apart from whether he was willing to part with so much or not, or had it to give, he was decidedly curious about what all this was for. A hundred dollars! Gee whiz!

After a moment or two, his mother added: "I'll tell you what I've been thinking. I must have a hundred dollars, but I can't tell you for what now, you nor any one, and you mustn't ask me. There's an old gold watch of your father's in my desk and a solid gold ring and pin of mine. Those things ought to be worth twenty-five dollars at least, if they were sold or pawned. Then there is that set of solid silver knives and forks and that silver platter and pitcher in there"—Clyde knew the keepsakes well—"that platter alone is worth twenty-five dollars. I believe they ought to bring at least twenty or twenty-five together. I was thinking if I could get you to go to some good pawnshop with them down near where you work, and then if you would let me have five more a week for a while" (Clyde's countenance fell)—"I could get a friend of mine—Mr. Murch who comes here, you know—to advance me enough to make up the hundred, and then I could pay him back out of what you pay me. I have about ten dollars myself."

She looked at Clyde as much as to say: "Now, surely, you won't desert me in my hour of trouble," and Clyde relaxed, in spite of the fact that he had been counting upon using quite all that he earned for himself. In fact, he agreed to take the trinkets to the pawnshop, and to advance her five more for the time being until the difference between whatever the trinkets brought and one hundred dollars was made up. And yet in spite of himself, he could not help resenting this extra strain, for it had only been a very short time that he had been earning so much. And here

was his mother demanding more and more, as he saw it—ten dollars a week now. Always something wrong, thought Clyde, always something needed, and with no assurance that there would not be more such demands later.

He took the trinkets, carried them to the most presentable pawnshop he could find, and being offered forty-five dollars for the lot, took it. This, with his mother's ten, would make fifty-five, and with forty-five she could borrow from Mr. Murch, would make a hundred. Only now, as he saw, it would mean that for nine weeks he would have to give her ten dollars instead of five. And that, in view of his present aspirations to dress, live and enjoy himself in a way entirely different from what he previously considered necessary, was by no means a pleasure to contemplate. Nevertheless he decided to do it. After all he owed his mother something. She had made many sacrifices for him and the others in days past and he could not afford to be too selfish. It was not decent.

But the most enduring thought that now came to him was that if his mother and father were going to look to him for financial aid, they should be willing to show him more consideration than had previously been shown him. For one thing he ought to be allowed to come and go with more freedom, in so far as his night hours were concerned. And at the same time he was clothing himself and eating his meals at the hotel, and that was no small item, as he saw it.

However, there was another problem that had soon arisen and it was this. Not so long after the matter of the hundred dollars, he encountered his mother in Montrose Street, one of the poorest streets which ran north from Bickel, and which consisted entirely of two unbroken lines of wooden houses and two-story flats and many unfurnished apartments. Even the Griffiths, poor as they were, would have felt themselves demeaned by the thought of having to dwell in such a street. His mother was coming down the front steps of one of the less tatterdemalion houses of this row, a lower front window of which carried a very conspicuous card which read "Furnished Rooms." And then, without turning or seeing Clyde across the street, she proceeded to another house a few doors away, which also carried a furnished rooms card and, after surveying the exterior interestedly, mounted the steps and rang the bell.

Clyde's first impression was that she was seeking the whereabouts of some individual in whom she was interested and of whose address she was not certain. But crossing over to her at about the moment the proprietress of the house put her head out

of the door, he heard his mother say: "You have a room for rent?" "Yes." "Has it a bath?" "No, but there's a bath on the second floor." "How much is it a week?" "Four dollars." "Could I see it?" "Yes, just step in."

Mrs. Griffiths appeared to hesitate while Clyde stood below, not twenty-five feet away, and looked up at her, waiting for her to turn and recognize him. But she stepped in without turning. And Clyde gazed after her curiously, for while it was by no means inconceivable that his mother might be looking for a room for some one, yet why should she be looking for it in this street when as a rule she usually dealt with the Salvation Army or the Young Women's Christian Association. His first impulse was to wait and inquire of her what she was doing here, but being interested in several errands of his own, he went on.

That night, returning to his own home to dress and seeing his mother in the kitchen, he said to her: "I saw you this morning, Ma, in Montrose Street."

"Yes," his mother replied, after a moment, but not before he had noticed that she had started suddenly as though taken aback by this information. She was paring potatoes and looked at him curiously. "Well, what of it?" she added, calmly, but flushing just the same—a thing decidedly unusual in connection with her where he was concerned. Indeed, that start of surprise interested and arrested Clyde. "You were going into a house there —looking for a furnished room, I guess."

"Yes, I was," replied Mrs. Griffiths, simply enough now. "I need a room for some one who is sick and hasn't much money, but it's not so easy to find either." She turned away as though she were not disposed to discuss this any more, and Clyde, while sensing her mood, apparently, could not resist adding: "Gee, that's not much of a street to have a room in." His new work at the Green-Davidson had already caused him to think differently of how one should live—any one. She did not answer him and he went to his room to change his clothes.

A month or so after this, coming east on Missouri Avenue late one evening, he again saw his mother in the near distance coming west. In the light of one of the small stores which ranged in a row on this street, he saw that she was carrying a rather heavy old-fashioned bag, which had long been about the house but had never been much used by any one. On sight of him approaching (as he afterwards decided) she had stopped suddenly and turned into a hallway of a three-story brick apartment building, and when he came up to it, he found the outside door was shut. He opened it, and saw a flight of steps dimly

lit, up which she might have gone. However, he did not trouble to investigate, for he was uncertain, once he reached this place, whether she had gone in to call on some one or not, it had all happened so quickly. But waiting at the next corner, he finally saw her come out again. And then to his increasing curiosity, she appeared to look cautiously about before proceeding as before. It was this that caused him to think that she must have been endeavoring to conceal herself from him. But why?

His first impulse was to turn and follow her, so interested was he by her strange movements. But he decided later that if she did not want him to know what she was doing, perhaps it was best that he should not. At the same time he was made intensely curious by this evasive gesture. Why should his mother not wish him to see her carrying a bag anywhere? Evasion and concealment formed no part of her real disposition (so different from his own). Almost instantly his mind proceeded to join this coincidence with the time he had seen her descending the steps of the rooming house in Montrose Street, together with the business of the letter he had found her reading, and the money she had been compelled to raise—the hundred dollars. Where could she be going? What was she hiding?

He speculated on all this, but he could not decide whether it had any definite connection with him or any member of the family until about a week later, when, passing along Eleventh near Baltimore, he thought he saw Esta, or at least a girl so much like her that she would be taken for her anywhere. She had the same height, and she was moving along as Esta used to walk. Only, now he thought as he saw her, she looked older. Yet, so quickly had she come and gone in the mass of people that he had not been able to make sure. It was only a glance, but on the strength of it, he had turned and sought to catch up with her, but upon reaching the spot she was gone. So convinced was he, however, that he had seen her that he went straight home, and, encountering his mother in the mission, announced that he was positive he had seen Esta. She must be back in Kansas City again. He could have sworn to it. He had seen her near Eleventh and Baltimore, or thought he had. Had his mother heard anything from her?

And then curiously enough he observed that his mother's manner was not exactly what he thought it should have been under the circumstances. His own attitude had been one of commingled astonishment, pleasure, curiosity and sympathy because of the sudden disappearance and now sudden reappearance of Esta. Could it be that his mother had used that hun-

dred dollars to bring her back? The thought had come to him—why or from where, he could not say. He wondered. But if so, why had she not returned to her home, at least to notify the family of her presence here?

He expected his mother would be as astonished and puzzled as he was—quick and curious for details. Instead, she appeared to him to be obviously confused and taken aback by this information, as though she was hearing about something that she already knew and was puzzled as to just what her attitude should be.

"Oh, did you? Where? Just now, you say? At Eleventh and Baltimore? Well, isn't that strange? I must speak to Asa about this. It's strange that she wouldn't come here if she is back." Her eyes, as he saw, instead of looking astonished, looked puzzled, disturbed. Her mouth, always the case when she was a little embarrassed and disconcerted, worked oddly—not only the lips but the jaw itself.

"Well, well," she added, after a pause. "That is strange. Perhaps it was just some one who looked like her."

But Clyde, watching her out of the corner of his eye, could not believe that she was as astonished as she pretended. And, thereafter, Asa coming in, and Clyde not having as yet departed for the hotel, he heard them discussing the matter in some strangely inattentive and unillumined way, as if it was not quite as startling as it had seemed to him. And for some time he was not called in to explain what he had seen.

And then, as if purposely to solve this mystery for him, he encountered his mother one day passing along Spruce Street, this time carrying a small basket on her arm. She had, as he had noticed of late, taken to going out regularly mornings and afternoons or evenings. On this occasion, and long before she had had an opportunity to see him, he had discerned her peculiarly heavy figure draped in the old brown coat which she always wore, and had turned into Myrkel Street and waited for her to pass, a convenient news stand offering him shelter. Once she had passed, he dropped behind her, allowing her to precede him by half a block. And at Dalrymple, she crossed to Beaudry, which was really a continuation of Spruce, but not so ugly. The houses were quite old—quondam residences of an earlier day, but now turned into boarding and rooming houses. Into one of these he saw her enter and disappear, but before doing so she looked inquiringly about her.

After she had entered, Clyde approached the house and studied it with great interest. What was his mother doing in there? Who was it she was going to see? He could scarcely have

explained his intense curiosity to himself, and yet, since having thought that he had seen Esta on the street, he had an unconvinced feeling that it might have something to do with her. There were the letters, the one hundred dollars, the furnished room in Montrose Street.

Diagonally across the way from the house in Beaudry Street there was a large-trunked tree, leafless now in the winter wind, and near it a telegraph pole, close enough to make a joint shadow with it. And behind these he was able to stand unseen, and from this vantage point to observe the several windows, side and front and ground and second floor. Through one of the front windows above, he saw his mother moving about as though she were quite at home there. And a moment later, to his astonishment he saw Esta come to one of the two windows and put a package down on the sill. She appeared to have on only a light dressing gown or a wrap drawn about her shoulders. He was not mistaken this time. He actually started as he realized that it was she, also that his mother was in there with her. And yet what had she done that she must come back and hide away in this manner? Had her husband, the man she had run away with, deserted her?

He was so intensely curious that he decided to wait a while outside here to see if his mother might not come out, and then he himself would call on Esta. He wanted so much to see her again—to know what this mystery was all about. He waited, thinking how he had always liked Esta and how strange it was that she should be here, hiding away in this mysterious way.

After an hour, his mother came out, her basket apparently empty, for she held it lightly in her hand. And just as before, she looked cautiously about her, her face wearing that same stolid and yet care-stamped expression which it always wore these days—a cross between an uplifting faith and a troublesome doubt.

Clyde watched her as she proceeded to walk south on Beaudry Street toward the Mission. After she was well out of sight, he turned and entered the house. Inside, as he had surmised, he found a collection of furnished rooms, name plates some of which bore the names of the roomers pasted upon them. Since he knew that the southeast front room upstairs contained Esta, he proceeded there and knocked. And true enough, a light footstep responded within, and presently, after some little delay which seemed to suggest some quick preparation within, the door opened slightly and Esta peeped out—quizzically at first, then with a little cry of astonishment and some confusion. For, as inquiry

and caution disappeared, she realized that she was looking at Clyde. At once she opened the door wide.

"Why, Clyde," she called. "How did you come to find me? I was just thinking of you."

Clyde at once put his arms around her and kissed her. At the same time he realized, and with a slight sense of shock and dissatisfaction, that she was considerably changed. She was thinner—paler—her eyes almost sunken, and not any better dressed than when he had seen her last. She appeared nervous and depressed. One of the first thoughts that came to him now was where her husband was. Why wasn't he here? What had become of him? As he looked about and at her, he noticed that Esta's look was one of confusion and uncertainty, not unmixed with a little satisfaction at seeing him. Her mouth was partly open because of a desire to smile and to welcome him, but her eyes showed that she was contending with a problem.

"I didn't expect you here," she added, quickly, the moment he released her. "You didn't see—" Then she paused, catching herself at the brink of some information which evidently she didn't wish to impart.

"Yes, I did, too—I saw Ma," he replied. "That's how I came to know you were here. I saw her coming out just now and I saw you up here through the window." (He did not care to confess that he had been following and watching his mother for an hour.) "But when did you get back?" he went on. "It's a wonder you wouldn't let the rest of us know something about you. Gee, you're a dandy, you are—going away and staying months and never letting any one of us know anything. You might have written me a little something, anyhow. We always got along pretty well, didn't we?"

His glance was quizzical, curious, imperative. She, for her part, felt recessive and thence evasive—uncertain, quite, what to think or say or tell.

She uttered: "I couldn't think who it might be. No one comes here. But, my, how nice you look, Clyde. You've got such nice clothes, now. And you're getting taller. Mamma was telling me you are working at the Green-Davidson."

She looked at him admiringly and he was properly impressed by her notice of him. At the same time he could not get his mind off her condition. He could not cease looking at her face, her eyes, her thin-fat body. And as he looked at her waist and her gaunt face, he came to a very keen realization that all was not well with her. She was going to have a child. And hence the thought recurred to him—where was her husband—or at any

rate, the man she had eloped with. Her original note, according to her mother, had said that she was going to get married. Yet now he sensed quite clearly that she was not married. She was deserted, left in this miserable room here alone. He saw it, felt it, understood it.

And he thought at once that this was typical of all that seemed to occur in his family. Here he was just getting a start, trying to be somebody and get along in the world and have a good time. And here was Esta, after her first venture in the direction of doing something for herself, coming to such a finish as this. It made him a little sick and resentful.

"How long have you been back, Esta?" he repeated dubiously, scarcely knowing just what to say now, for now that he was here and she was as she was he began to scent expense, trouble, distress and to wish almost that he had not been so curious. Why need he have been? It could only mean that he must help.

"Oh, not so very long, Clyde. About a month, now, I guess. Not more than that."

"I thought so. I saw you up on Eleventh near Baltimore about a month ago, didn't I? Sure I did," he added a little less joyously—a change that Esta noted. At the same time she nodded her head affirmatively. "I knew I did. I told Ma so at the time, but she didn't seem to think so. She wasn't as surprised as I thought she would be, though. I know why, now. She acted as though she didn't want me to tell her about it either. But I knew I wasn't wrong." He stared at Esta oddly, quite proud of his prescience in this case. He paused though, not knowing quite what else to say and wondering whether what he had just said was of any sense or import. It didn't seem to suggest any real aid for her.

And she, not quite knowing how to pass over the nature of her condition, or to confess it, either, was puzzled what to say. Something had to be done. For Clyde could see for himself that her predicament was dreadful. She could scarcely bear the look of his inquiring eyes. And more to extricate herself than her mother, she finally observed, "Poor Mamma. You mustn't think it strange of her, Clyde. She doesn't know what to do, you see, really. It's all my fault, of course. If I hadn't run away, I wouldn't have caused her all this trouble. She has so little to do with and she's always had such a hard time." She turned her back to him suddenly, and her shoulders began to tremble and her sides to heave. She put her hands to her face and bent her head low—and then he knew that she was silently crying.

"Oh, come now, sis," exclaimed Clyde, drawing near to her instantly and feeling intensely sorry for her at the moment. "What's the matter? What do you want to cry for? Didn't that man that you went away with marry you?"

She shook her head negatively and sobbed the more. And in that instant there came to Clyde the real psychological as well as sociological and biological import of his sister's condition. She was in trouble, pregnant—and with no money and no husband. That was why his mother had been looking for a room. That was why she had tried to borrow a hundred dollars from him. She was ashamed of Esta and her condition. She was ashamed of not only what people outside the family would think, but of what he and Julia and Frank might think—the effect of Esta's condition upon them perhaps—because it was not right, unmoral, as people saw it. And for that reason she had been trying to conceal it, telling stories about it—a most amazing and difficult thing for her, no doubt. And yet, because of poor luck, she hadn't succeeded very well.

And now he was again confused and puzzled, not only by his sister's condition and what it meant to him and the other members of the family here in Kansas City, but also by his mother's disturbed and somewhat unmoral attitude in regard to deception in this instance. She had evaded if not actually deceived him in regard to all this, for she knew Esta was here all the time. At the same time he was not inclined to be too unsympathetic in that respect toward her—far from it. For such deception in such an instance had to be, no doubt, even where people were as religious and truthful as his mother, or so he thought. You couldn't just let people know. He certainly wouldn't want to let people know about Esta, if he could help it. What would they think? What would they say about her and him? Wasn't the general state of his family low enough, as it was? And so, now he stood, staring and puzzled the while Esta cried. And she realizing that he was puzzled and ashamed, because of her, cried the more.

"Gee, that is tough," said Clyde, troubled, and yet fairly sympathetic after a time. "You wouldn't have run away with him unless you cared for him though—would you?" (He was thinking of himself and Hortense Briggs.) "I'm sorry for you, Ess. Sure, I am, but it won't do you any good to cry about it now, will it? There's lots of other fellows in the world beside him. You'll come out of it all right."

"Oh, I know," sobbed Esta, "but I've been so foolish. And I've had such a hard time. And now I've brought all this

trouble on Mamma and all of you." She choked and hushed a moment. "He went off and left me in a hotel in Pittsburgh without any money," she added. "And if it hadn't been for Mamma, I don't know what I would have done. She sent me a hundred dollars when I wrote her. I worked for a while in a restaurant—as long as I could. I didn't want to write home and say that he had left me. I was ashamed to. But I didn't know what else to do there toward the last, when I began feeling so bad."

She began to cry again; and Clyde, realizing all that his mother had done and sought to do to assist her, felt almost as sorry now for his mother as he did for Esta—more so, for Esta had her mother to look after her and his mother had almost no one to help her.

"I can't work yet, because I won't be able to for a while," she went on. "And Mamma doesn't want me to come home now because she doesn't want Julia or Frank or you to know. And that's right, too, I know. Of course it is. And she hasn't got anything and I haven't. And I get so lonely here, sometimes." Her eyes filled and she began to choke again. "And I've been so foolish."

And Clyde felt for the moment as though he could cry too. For life was so strange, so hard at times. See how it had treated him all these years. He had had nothing until recently and always wanted to run away. But Esta had done so, and see what had befallen her. And somehow he recalled her between the tall walls of the big buildings here in the business district, sitting at his father's little street organ and singing and looking so innocent and good. Gee, life was tough. What a rough world it was anyhow. How queer things went!

He looked at her and the room, and finally, telling her that she wouldn't be left alone, and that he would come again, only she mustn't tell his mother he had been there, and that if she needed anything she could call on him although he wasn't making so very much, either—and then went out. And then, walking toward the hotel to go to work, he kept dwelling on the thought of how miserable it all was—how sorry he was that he had followed his mother, for then he might not have known. But even so, it would have come out. His mother could not have concealed it from him indefinitely. She would have asked for more money eventually maybe. But what a dog that man was to go off and leave his sister in a big strange city without a dime. He puzzled, thinking now of the girl who had been deserted in the Green-Davidson some months before with a room

and board bill unpaid. And how comic it had seemed to him and the other boys at the time—highly colored with a sensual interest in it.

But this, well, this was his own sister. A man had thought so little of his sister as that. And yet, try as he would, he could no longer think that it was as terrible as when he heard her crying in the room. Here was this brisk, bright city about him running with people and effort, and this gay hotel in which he worked. That was not so bad. Besides there was his own love affair, Hortense, and pleasures. There must be some way out for Esta. She would get well again and be all right. But to think of his being part of a family that was always so poor and so little thought of that things like this could happen to it—one thing and another—like street preaching, not being able to pay the rent at times, his father selling rugs and clocks for a living on the streets—Esta running away and coming to an end like this. Gee!

CHAPTER XIV

THE result of all this on Clyde was to cause him to think more specifically on the problem of the sexes than he ever had before, and by no means in any orthodox way. For while he condemned his sister's lover for thus ruthlessly deserting her, still he was not willing to hold her entirely blameless by any means. She had gone off with him. As he now learned from her, he had been in the city for a week the year before she ran away with him, and it was then that he had introduced himself to her. The following year when he returned for two weeks, it was she who looked him up, or so Clyde suspected, at any rate. And in view of his own interest in and mood regarding Hortense Briggs, it was not for him to say that there was anything wrong with the sex relation in itself.

Rather, as he saw it now, the difficulty lay, not in the deed itself, but in the consequences which followed upon not thinking or not knowing. For had Esta known more of the man in whom she was interested, more of what such a relationship with him meant, she would not be in her present pathetic plight. Certainly such girls as Hortense Briggs, Greta and Louise, would never have allowed themselves to be put in any such position as Esta. Or would they? They were too shrewd. And by contrast with them in his mind, at least at this time, she suffered. She ought, as he saw it, to have been able to manage better. And so, by degrees, his attitude toward her hardened in some measure, though his feeling was not one of indifference either.

But the one influence that was affecting and troubling and changing him now was his infatuation for Hortense Briggs—than which no more agitating influence could have come to a youth of his years and temperament. She seemed, after his few contacts with her, to be really the perfect realization of all that he had previously wished for in a girl. She was so bright, vain, engaging, and so truly pretty. Her eyes, as they seemed to him, had a kind of dancing fire in them. She had a most entrancing way of pursing and parting her lips and at the same time looking straightly and indifferently before her, as though she were not thinking of him, which to him was both flame and fever. It caused him, actually, to feel weak and dizzy, at times, cruelly

seared in his veins with minute and wriggling threads of fire, and this could only be described as conscious lust, a torturesome and yet unescapable thing which yet in her case he was unable to prosecute beyond embracing and kissing, a form of reserve and respect in regard to her which she really resented in the very youths in whom she sought to inspire it. The type of boy for whom she really cared and was always seeking was one who could sweep away all such psuedo-ingenuousness and superiorities in her and force her, even against herself, to yield to him.

In fact she was constantly wavering between actual like and dislike of him. And in consequence, he was in constant doubt as to where he stood, a state which was very much relished by her and yet which was never permitted to become so fixed in his mind as to cause him to give her up entirely. After some party or dinner or theater to which she had permitted him to take her, and throughout which he had been particularly tactful—not too assertive—she could be as yielding and enticing in her mood as the most ambitious lover would have liked. And this might last until the evening was nearly over, when suddenly, and at her own door or the room or house of some girl with whom she was spending the night, she would turn, and without rhyme or reason, endeavor to dismiss him with a mere handclasp or a thinly flavored embrace or kiss. At such times, if Clyde was foolish enough to endeavor to force her to yield the favors he craved, she would turn on him with the fury of a spiteful cat, would tear herself away, developing for the moment, seemingly, an intense mood of opposition which she could scarcely have explained to herself. Its chief mental content appeared to be one of opposition to being compelled by him to do anything. And, because of his infatuation and his weak overtures due to his inordinate fear of losing her, he would be forced to depart, usually in a dark and despondent mood.

But so keen was her attraction for him that he could not long remain away, but must be going about to where most likely he would encounter her. Indeed, for the most part these days, and in spite of the peculiar climax which had eventuated in connection with Esta, he lived in a keen, sweet and sensual dream in regard to her. If only she would really come to care for him. At night, in his bed at home, he would lie and think of her—her face—the expressions of her mouth and eyes, the lines of her figure, the motions of her body in walking or dancing—and she would flicker before him as upon a screen. In his dreams, he found her deliciously near him, pressing against him—her delightful body all his—and then in the moment of

crisis, when seemingly she was about to yield herself to him completely, he would awake to find her vanished—an illusion only.

Yet there were several things in connection with her which seemed to bode success for him. In the first place, like himself, she was part of a poor family—the daughter of a machinist and his wife, who up to this very time had achieved little more than a bare living. From her childhood she had had nothing, only such gew-gaws and fripperies as she could secure for herself by her wits. And so low had been her social state until very recently that she had not been able to come in contact with anything better than butcher and baker boys—the rather commonplace urchins and small job aspirants of her vicinity. Yet even here she had early realized that she could and should capitalize her looks and charm—and had. Not a few of these had even gone so far as to steal in order to get money to entertain her.

After reaching the age where she was old enough to go to work, and thus coming in contact with the type of boy and man in whom she was now interested, she was beginning to see that without yielding herself too much, but in acting discreetly, she could win a more interesting equipment than she had before. Only, so truly sensual and pleasure-loving was she that she was by no means always willing to divorce her self-advantages from her pleasures. On the contrary, she was often troubled by a desire to like those whom she sought to use, and per contra, not to obligate herself to those whom she could not like.

In Clyde's case, liking him but a little, she still could not resist the desire to use him. She liked his willingness to buy her any little thing in which she appeared interested—a bag, a scarf, a purse, a pair of gloves—anything that she could reasonably ask or take without obligating herself too much. And yet from the first, in her smart, tricky way, she realized that unless she could bring herself to yield to him—at some time or other offer him the definite reward which she knew he craved—she could not hold him indefinitely.

One thought that stirred her more than anything else was that the way Clyde appeared to be willing to spend his money on her she might easily get some quite expensive things from him—a pretty and rather expensive dress, perhaps, or a hat, or even a fur coat such as was then being shown and worn in the city, to say nothing of gold earrings, or a wrist watch, all of which she was constantly and enviously eyeing in the different shop windows.

One day not so long after Clyde's discovery of his sister

Esta, Hortense, walking along Baltimore Street near its junction with Fifteenth—the smartest portion of the shopping section of the city—at the noon hour—with Doris Trine, another shop girl in her department store, saw in the window of one of the smaller and less exclusive fur stores of the city, a fur jacket of beaver that to her, viewed from the eye-point of her own particular build, coloring and temperament, was exactly what she needed to strengthen mightily her very limited personal wardrobe. It was not such an expensive coat, worth possibly a hundred dollars—but fashioned in such an individual way as to cause her to imagine that, once invested with it, her own physical charm would register more than it ever had.

Moved by this thought, she paused and exclaimed: "Oh, isn't that just the classiest, darlingest little coat you ever saw! Oh, do look at those sleeves, Doris." She clutched her companion violently by the arm. "Lookit the collar. And the lining! And those pockets! Oh, dear!" She fairly vibrated with the intensity of her approval and delight. "Oh, isn't that just too sweet for words? And the very kind of coat I've been thinking of since I don't know when. Oh, you pitty sing!" she exclaimed, affectedly, thinking all at once as much of her own pose before the window and its effect on the passer-by as of the coat before her. "Oh, if I could only have 'oo."

She clapped her hands admiringly, while Isadore Rubenstein, the elderly son of the proprietor, who was standing somewhat out of the range of her gaze at the moment, noted the gesture and her enthusiasm and decided forthwith that the coat must be worth at least twenty-five or fifty dollars more to her, anyhow, in case she inquired for it. The firm had been offering it at one hundred. "Oh, ha!" he grunted. But being of a sensual and somewhat romantic turn, he also speculated to himself rather definitely as to the probable trading value, affectionally speaking, of such a coat. What, say, would the poverty and vanity of such a pretty girl as this cause her to yield for such a coat?

In the meantime, however, Hortense, having gloated as long as her noontime hour would permit, had gone away, still dreaming and satiating her flaming vanity by thinking of how devastating she would look in such a coat. But she had not stopped to ask the price. Hence, the next day, feeling that she must look at it once more, she returned, only this time alone, and yet with no idea of being able to purchase it herself. On the contrary, she was only vaguely revolving the problem of how, assuming that the coat was sufficiently low in price, she could get

it. At the moment she could think of no one. But seeing the coat once more, and also seeing Mr. Rubenstein, Jr., inside eyeing her in a most propitiatory and genial manner, she finally ventured in.

"You like the coat, eh?" was Rubenstein's ingratiating comment as she opened the door. "Well, that shows you have good taste, I'll say. That's one of the nobbiest little coats we've ever had to show in this store yet. A real beauty, that. And how it would look on such a beautiful girl as you!" He took it out of the window and held it up. "I seen you when you was looking at it yesterday." A gleam of greedy admiration was in his eye.

And noting this, and feeling that a remote and yet not wholly unfriendly air would win her more consideration and courtesy than a more intimate one, Hortense merely said, "Yes?"

"Yes, indeed. And I said right away, there's a girl that knows a really swell coat when she sees it."

The flattering unction soothed, in spite of herself.

"Look at that! Look at that!" went on Mr. Rubinstein, turning the coat about and holding it before her. "Where in Kansas City will you find anything to equal that to-day? Look at this silk lining here—genuine Mallinson silk—and these slant pockets. And the buttons. You think those things don't make a different-looking coat? There ain't another one like it in Kansas City to-day—not one. And there won't be. We designed it ourselves and we never repeat our models. We protect our customers. But come back here." (He led the way to a triple mirror at the back.) "It takes the right person to wear a coat like this—to get the best effect out of it. Let me try it on you."

And by the artificial light Hortense was now privileged to see how really fetching she did look in it. She cocked her head and twisted and turned and buried one small ear in the fur, while Mr. Rubenstein stood by, eyeing her with not a little admiration and almost rubbing his hands.

"There now," he continued. "Look at that. What do you say to that, eh? Didn't I tell you it was the very thing for you? A find for you. A pick-up. You'll never get another coat like that in this city. If you do, I'll make you a present of this one." He came very near, extending his plump hands, palms up.

"Well, I must say it does look smart on me," commented Hortense, her vainglorious soul yearning for it. "I can wear anything like this, though." She twisted and turned the more, forgetting him entirely and the effect her interest would have on his cost price. Then she added: "How much is it?"

"Well, it's really a two-hundred-dollar coat," began Mr. Rubenstein artfully. Then noting a shadow of relinquishment pass swiftly over Hortense's face, he added quickly: "That sounds like a lot of money, but of course we don't ask so much for it down here. One hundred and fifty is our price. But if that coat was at Jarek's, that's what you'd pay for it and more. We haven't got the location here and we don't have to pay the high rents. But it's worth every cent of two hundred."

"Why, I think that's a terrible price to ask for it, just awful," exclaimed Hortense sadly, beginning to remove the coat. She was feeling as though life were depriving her of nearly all that was worth while. "Why, at Biggs and Becks, they have lots of three-quarter mink and beaver coats for that much, and classy styles, too."

"Maybe, maybe. But not that coat," insisted Mr. Rubenstein stubbornly. "Just look at it again. Look at the collar. You mean to say you can find a coat like that up there? If you can, I'll buy the coat for you and sell it to you again for a hundred dollars. Actually, this is a special coat. It's copied from one of the smartest coats that was in New York last summer before the season opened. It has class. You won't find no coat like this coat."

"Oh, well, just the same, a hundred and fifty dollars is more than I can pay," commented Hortense dolefully, at the same time slipping on her old broadcloth jacket with the fur collar and cuffs, and edging toward the door.

"Wait! You like the coat?" wisely observed Mr. Rubenstein, after deciding that even a hundred dollars was too much for her purse, unless it could be supplemented by some man's. "It's really a two-hundred-dollar coat. I'm telling you that straight. Our regular price is one hundred and fifty. But if you could bring me a hundred and twenty-five dollars, since you want it so much, well, I'll let you have it for that. And that's like finding it. A stunning-looking girl like you oughtn't to have no trouble in finding a dozen fellows who would be glad to buy that coat and give it to you. I know I would, if I thought you would be nice to me."

He beamed ingratiatingly up at her, and Hortense, sensing the nature of the overture and resenting it—from him—drew back slightly. At the same time she was not wholly displeased by the compliment involved. But she was not coarse enough, as yet, to feel that just any one should be allowed to give her any-

thing. Indeed not. It must be some one she liked, or at least some one that was enslaved by her.

And yet, even as Mr. Rubenstein spoke, and for some time afterwards, her mind began running upon possible individuals—favorites—who, by the necromancy of her charm for them, might be induced to procure this coat for her. Charlie Wilkens for instance—he of the Orphia cigar store—who was most certainly devoted to her after his fashion, but a fashion, however, which did not suggest that he might do much for her without getting a good deal in return.

And then there was Robert Kain, another youth—very tall, very cheerful and very ambitious in regard to her, who was connected with one of the local electric company's branch offices, but his position was not sufficiently lucrative—a mere entry clerk. Also he was too saving—always talking about his future.

And again, there was Bert Gettler, the youth who had escorted her to the dance the night Clyde first met her, but who was little more than a giddy-headed dancing soul, one not to be relied upon in a crisis like this. He was only a shoe salesman, probably twenty dollars a week, and most careful with his pennies.

But there was Clyde Griffiths, the person who seemed to have real money and to be willing to spend it on her freely. So ran her thoughts swiftly at the time. But could she now, she asked herself, offhand, inveigle him into making such an expensive present as this? She had not favored him so very much—had for the most part treated him indifferently. Hence she was not sure, by any means. Nevertheless as she stood there, debating the cost and the beauty of the coat, the thought of Clyde kept running through her mind. And all the while Mr. Rubenstein stood looking at her, vaguely sensing, after his fashion, the nature of the problem that was confronting her.

"Well, little girl," he finally observed, "I see you'd like to have this coat, all right, and I'd like to have you have it, too. And now I'll tell you what I'll do, and better than that I can't do, and wouldn't for nobody else—not a person in this city. Bring me a hundred and fifteen dollars any time within the next few days—Monday or Wednesday or Friday, if the coat is still here, and you can have it. I'll do even better. I'll save it for you. How's that? Until next Wednesday or Friday. More'n that no one would do for you, now, would they?"

He smirked and shrugged his shoulders and acted as though he were indeed doing her a great favor. And Hortense, going away, felt that if only—only she could take that coat at one

hundred and fifteen dollars, she would be capturing a marvelous bargain. Also that she would be the smartest-dressed girl in Kansas City beyond the shadow of a doubt. If only she could in some way get a hundred and fifteen dollars before next Wednesday, or Friday.

CHAPTER XV

AS Hortense well knew Clyde was pressing more and more hungrily toward that ultimate condescension on her part, which, though she would never have admitted it to him, was the privilege of two others. They were never together any more without his insisting upon the real depth of her regard for him. Why was it, if she cared for him the least bit, that she refused to do this, that or the other—would not let him kiss her as much as he wished, would not let him hold her in his arms as much as he would like. She was always keeping dates with other fellows and breaking them or refusing to make them with him. What was her exact relationship toward these others? Did she really care more for them than she did for him? In fact, they were never together anywhere but what this problem of union was uppermost—and but thinly veiled.

And she liked to think that he was suffering from repressed desire for her all of the time; that she tortured him, and that the power to allay his suffering lay wholly in her—a sadistic trait which had for its soil Clyde's own masochistic yearning for her.

However, in the face of her desire for the coat, his stature and interest for her were beginning to increase. In spite of the fact that only the morning before she had informed Clyde, with quite a flourish, that she could not possibly see him until the following Monday—that all her intervening nights were taken—nevertheless, the problem of the coat looming up before her, she now most eagerly planned to contrive an immediate engagement with him without appearing too eager. For by then she had definitely decided to endeavor to persuade him, if possible, to buy the coat for her. Only, of course, she would have to alter her conduct toward him radically. She would have to be much sweeter—more enticing. Although she did not actually say to herself that now she might even be willing to yield herself to him, still basically that was what was in her mind.

For quite a little while she was unable to think how to proceed. How was she to see him this day, or the next at the very latest? How should she go about putting before him the need of this gift, or loan, as she finally worded it to herself?

She might hint that he could loan her enough to buy the coat and that later she would pay him back by degrees (yet once in possession of the coat she well knew that that necessity would never confront her). Or, if he did not have so much money on hand at one time, she could suggest that she might arrange with Mr. Rubenstein for a series of time payments which could be met by Clyde. In this connection her mind suddenly turned and began to consider how she could flatter and cajole Mr. Rubenstein into letting her have the coat on easy terms. She recalled that he had said he would be glad to buy the coat for her if he thought she would be nice to him.

Her first scheme in connection with all this was to suggest to Louise Ratterer to invite her brother, Clyde and a third youth by the name of Scull, who was dancing attendance upon Louise, to come to a certain dance hall that very evening to which she was already planning to go with the more favored cigar clerk. Only now she intended to break that engagement and appear alone with Louise and Greta and announce that her proposed partner was ill. That would give her an opportunity to leave early with Clyde and with him walk past the Rubenstein store.

But having the temperament of a spider that spins a web for flies, she foresaw that this might involve the possibility of Louise's explaining to Clyde or Ratterer that it was Hortense who had instigated the party. It might even bring up some accidental mention of the coat on the part of Clyde to Louise later, which, as she felt, would never do. She did not care to let her friends know how she provided for herself. In consequence, she decided that it would not do for her to appeal to Louise nor to Greta in this fashion.

And she was actually beginning to worry as to how to bring about this encounter, when Clyde, who chanced to be in the vicinity on his way home from work, walked into the store where she was working. He was seeking for a date on the following Sunday. And to his intense delight, Hortense greeted him most cordially with a most engaging smile and a wave of the hand. She was busy at the moment with a customer. She soon finished, however, and drawing near, and keeping one eye on her floor-walker who resented callers, exclaimed: "I was just thinking about you. You wasn't thinking about me, was you? Trade last." Then she added, sotto voce, "Don't act like you are talking to me. I see our floor-walker over there."

Arrested by the unusual sweetness in her voice, to say nothing of the warm smile with which she greeted him, Clyde was

enlivened and heartened at once. "Was I thinking of you?" he returned gayly. "Do I ever think of any one else? Say! Ratterer says I've got you on the brain."

"Oh, him," replied Hortense, pouting spitefully and scornfully, for Ratterer, strangely enough, was one whom she did not interest very much, and this she knew. "He thinks he's so smart," she added. "I know a lotta girls don't like him."

"Oh, Tom's all right," pleaded Clyde, loyally. "That's just his way of talking. He likes you."

"Oh, no, he don't, either," replied Hortense. "But I don't want to talk about him. Whatcha doin' around six o'clock to-night?"

"Oh, gee!" exclaimed Clyde disappointedly. "You don't mean to say you got to-night free, have you? Well, ain't that tough? I thought you were all dated up. I got to work!" He actually sighed, so depressed was he by the thought that she might be willing to spend the evening with him and he not able to avail himself of the opportunity, while Hortense, noting his intense disappointment, was pleased.

"Well, I gotta date, but I don't want to keep it," she went on with a contemptuous gathering of the lips. "I don't have to break it. I would though if you was free." Clyde's heart began to beat rapidly with delight.

"Gee, I wish I didn't have to work now," he went on, looking at her. "You're sure you couldn't make it to-morrow night? I'm off then. And I was just coming up here to ask you if you didn't want to go for an automobile ride next Sunday afternoon, maybe. A friend of Hegglund's got a car—a Packard—and Sunday we're all off. And he wanted me to get a bunch to run out to Excelsior Springs. He's a nice fellow" (this because Hortense showed signs of not being so very much interested). "You don't know him very well, but he is. But say, I can talk to you about that later. How about to-morrow night? I'm off then."

Hortense, who, because of the hovering floor-walker, was pretending to show Clyde some handkerchiefs, was now thinking how unfortunate that a whole twenty-four hours must intervene before she could bring him to view the coat with her—and so have an opportunity to begin her machinations. At the same time she pretended that the proposed meeting for the next night was a very difficult thing to bring about—more difficult than he could possibly appreciate. She even pretended to be somewhat uncertain as to whether she wanted to do it.

"Just pretend you're examining these handkerchiefs here," she

continued, fearing the floor-walker might interrupt. "I gotta nother date for then," she continued thoughtfully, "and I don't know whether I can break it or not. Let me see." She feigned deep thought. "Well, I guess I can," she said finally. "I'll try, anyhow. Just for this once. You be here at Fifteenth and Main at 6.15—no, 6.30's the best you can do, ain't it?—and I'll see if I can't get there. I won't promise, but I'll see and I think I can make it. Is that all right?" She gave him one of her sweetest smiles and Clyde was quite beside himself with satisfaction. To think that she would break a date for him, at last. Her eyes were warm with favor and her mouth wreathed with a smile.

"Surest thing you know," he exclaimed, voicing the slang of the hotel boys. "You bet I'll be there. Will you do me a favor?"

"What is it?" she asked cautiously.

"Wear that little black hat with the red ribbon under your chin, will you? You look so cute in that."

"Oh, you," she laughed. It was so easy to kid Clyde. "Yes, I'll wear it," she added. "But you gotta go now. Here comes that old fish. I know he's going to kick. But I don't care. Six-thirty, eh? So long." She turned to give her attention to a new customer, an old lady who had been patiently waiting to inquire if she could tell her where the muslins were sold. And Clyde, tingling with pleasure because of this unexpected delight vouchsafed him, made his way most elatedly to the nearest exit.

He was not made unduly curious because of this sudden favor, and the next evening, promptly at six-thirty, and in the glow of the overhanging arc-lights showering their glistening radiance like rain, she appeared. As he noted, at once, she had worn the hat he liked. Also she was enticingly ebullient and friendly, more so than at any time he had known her. Before he had time to say that she looked pretty, or how pleased he was because she wore that hat, she began:

"Some favorite you're gettin' to be, *I'll say,* when *I'll* break an engagement and then wear an old hat I don't like just to please you. How do I get that way is what I'd like to know."

He beamed as though he had won a great victory. Could it be that at last he might be becoming a favorite with her?

"If you only knew how cute you look in that hat, Hortense, you wouldn't knock it," he urged admiringly. "You don't know how sweet you do look."

"Oh, ho. In this old thing?" she scoffed. "You certainly are easily pleased, I'll say."

"An' your eyes are just like soft, black velvet," he persisted eagerly. "They're wonderful." He was thinking of an alcove in the Green-Davidson hung with black velvet.

"Gee, you certainly have got 'em to-night," she laughed teasingly. "I'll have to do something about you." Then, before he could make any reply to this, she went off into an entirely fictional account of how, having had a previous engagement with a certain alleged young society man—Tom Keary by name—who was dogging her steps these days in order to get her to dine and dance, she had only this evening decided to "ditch" him, preferring Clyde, of course, for this occasion, anyhow. And she had called Keary up and told him that she could not see him to-night—called it all off, as it were. But just the same, on coming out of the employee's entrance, who should she see there waiting for her but this same Tom Keary, dressed to perfection in a bright gray raglan and spats, and with his closed sedan, too. And he would have taken her to the Green-Davidson, if she had wanted to go. He was a real sport. But she didn't. Not to-night, anyhow. Yet, if she had not contrived to avoid him, he would have delayed her. But she espied him first and ran the other way.

"And you should have just seen my little feet twinkle up Sargent and around the corner into Bailey Place," was the way she narcistically painted her flight. And so infatuated was Clyde by this picture of herself and the wonderful Keary that he accepted all of her petty fabrications as truth.

And then, as they were walking in the direction of Gaspie's, a restaurant in Wyandotte near Tenth which quite lately he had learned was much better than Frissell's, Hortense took occasion to pause and look in a number of windows, saying as she did so that she certainly did wish that she could find a little coat that was becoming to her—that the one she had on was getting worn and that she must have another soon—a predicament which caused Clyde to wonder at the time whether she was suggesting to him that he get her one. Also whether it might not advance his cause with her if he were to buy her a little jacket, since she needed it.

But Rubenstein's coming into view on this same side of the street, its display window properly illuminated and the coat in full view, Hortense paused as she had planned.

"Oh, do look at that darling little coat there," she began, ecstatically, as though freshly arrested by the beauty of it, her whole manner suggesting a first and unspoiled impression. "Oh, isn't that the dearest, sweetest, cutest little thing you ever did

see?" she went on, her histrionic powers growing with her desire for it. "Oh, just look at the collar, and those sleeves and those pockets. Aren't they the snappiest things you ever saw? Couldn't I just warm my little hands in those?" She glanced at Clyde out of the tail of her eye to see if he was being properly impressed.

And he, aroused by her intense interest, surveyed the coat with not a little curiosity. Unquestionably it was a pretty coat—very. But, gee, what would a coat like that cost, anyhow? Could it be that she was trying to interest him in the merits of a coat like that in order that he might get it for her? Why, it must be a two-hundred-dollar coat at least. He had no idea as to the value of such things, anyhow. He certainly couldn't afford a coat like that. And especially at this time when his mother was taking a good portion of his extra cash for Esta. And yet something in her manner seemed to bring it to him that that was exactly what she was thinking. It chilled and almost numbed him at first.

And yet, as he now told himself sadly, if Hortense wanted it, she could most certainly find some one who would get it for her—that young Tom Keary, for instance, whom she had just been describing. And, worse luck, she was just that kind of a girl. And if he could not get it for her, some one else could and she would despise him for not being able to do such things for her.

To his intense dismay and dissatisfaction she exclaimed: "Oh, what wouldn't I give for a coat like that!" She had not intended at the moment to put the matter so bluntly, for she wanted to convey the thought that was deepest in her mind to Clyde tactfully.

And Clyde, inexperienced as he was, and not subtle by any means, was nevertheless quite able to gather the meaning of that. It meant—it meant—for the moment he was not quite willing to formulate to himself what it did mean. And now—now—if only he had the price of that coat. He could feel that she was thinking of some one certain way to get the coat. And yet how was he to manage it? How? If he could only arrange to get this coat for her—if he only could promise her that he would get it for her by a certain date, say, if it didn't cost too much, then what? Did he have the courage to suggest to her to-night, or to-morrow, say, after he had learned the price of the coat, that if she would—why then—why then, well, he would get her the coat or anything else she really wanted. Only he must be sure that she was not really fooling him as she was always doing

in smaller ways. He wouldn't stand for getting her the coat and then get nothing in return—never!

As he thought of it, he actually thrilled and trembled beside her. And she, standing there and looking at the coat, was thinking that unless he had sense enough now to get her this thing and to get what she meant—how she intended to pay for it—well then, this was the last. He need not think she was going to fool around with any one who couldn't or wouldn't do that much for her. Never.

They resumed their walk toward Gaspie's. And throughout the dinner, she talked of little else—how attractive the coat was, how wonderful it would look on her.

"Believe me," she said at one point, defiantly, feeling that Clyde was perhaps uncertain at the moment about his ability to buy it for her, "I'm going to find some way to get that coat. I think, maybe, that Rubenstein store would let me have it on time if I were to go in there and see him about it, make a big enough payment down. Another girl out of our store got a coat that way once," she lied promptly, hoping thus to induce Clyde to assist her with it. But Clyde, disturbed by the fear of some extraordinary cost in connection with it, hesitated to say just what he would do. He could not even guess the price of such a thing—it might cost two or three hundred, even—and he feared to obligate himself to do something which later he might not be able to do.

"You don't know what they might want for that, do you?" he asked, nervously, at the same time thinking if he made any cash gift to her at this time without some guarantee on her part, what right would he have to expect anything more in return than he had ever received? He knew how she cajoled him into getting things for her and then would not even let him kiss her. He flushed and churned a little internally with resentment at the thought of how she seemed to feel that she could play fast and loose with him. And yet, as he now recalled, she had just said she would do anything for any one who would get that coat for her—or nearly that.

"No-o," she hesitated at first, for the moment troubled as to whether to give the exact price or something higher. For if she asked for time, Mr. Rubenstein might want more. And yet if she said much more, Clyde might not want to help her. "But I know it wouldn't be more than a hundred and twenty-five. I wouldn't pay more than that for it."

Clyde heaved a sigh of relief. After all, it wasn't two or

three hundred. He began to think now that if she could arrange to make any reasonable down payment—say, fifty or sixty dollars—he might manage to bring it together within the next two or three weeks anyhow. But if the whole hundred and twenty-five were demanded at once, Hortense would have to wait, and besides he would have to know whether he was to be rewarded or not—definitely.

"That's a good idea, Hortense," he exclaimed without, however, indicating in any way why it appealed to him so much. "Why don't you do that? Why don't you find out first what they want for it, and how much they want down? Maybe I could help you with it."

"Oh, won't that be just too wonderful!" Hortense clapped her hands. "Oh, will you? Oh, won't that be just dandy? Now I just know I can get that coat. I just know they'll let me have it, if I talk to them right."

She was, as Clyde saw and feared, quite forgetting the fact that he was the one who was making the coat possible, and now it would be just as he thought. The fact that he was paying for it would be taken for granted.

But a moment later, observing his glum face, she added: "Oh, aren't you the sweetest, dearest thing, to help me in this way. You just bet I won't forget this either. You just wait and see. You won't be sorry. Now you just wait." Her eyes fairly snapped with gayety and even generosity toward him.

He might be easy and young, but he wasn't mean, and she would reward him, too, she now decided. Just as soon as she got the coat, which must be in a week or two at the latest, she was going to be very nice to him—do something for him. And to emphasize her own thoughts and convey to him what she really meant, she allowed her eyes to grow soft and swimming and to dwell on him promisingly—a bit of romantic acting which caused him to become weak and nervous. The gusto of her favor frightened him even a little, for it suggested, as he fancied, a disturbing vitality which he might not be able to match. He felt a little weak before her now—a little cowardly—in the face of what he assumed her real affection might mean.

Nevertheless, he now announced that if the coat did not cost more than one hundred and twenty-five dollars, that sum to be broken into one payment of twenty-five dollars down and two additional sums of fifty dollars each, he could manage it. And she on her part replied that she was going the very next day to see about it. Mr. Rubenstein might be induced to let her have

it at once on the payment of twenty-five dollars down; if not that, then at the end of the second week, when nearly all would be paid.

And then in real gratitude to Clyde she whispered to him, coming out of the restaurant and purring like a cat, that she would never forget this and that he would see—and that she would wear it for him the very first time. If he were not working they might go somewhere to dinner. Or, if not that, then she would have it surely in time for the day of the proposed automobile ride which he, or rather Hegglund, had suggested for the following Sunday, but which might be postponed.

She suggested that they go to a certain dance hall, and there she clung to him in the dances in a suggestive way and afterwards hinted of a mood which made Clyde a little quivery and erratic.

He finally went home, dreaming of the day, satisfied that he would have no trouble in bringing together the first payment, if it were so much as fifty, even. For now, under the spur of this promise, he proposed to borrow as much as twenty-five from either Ratterer or Hegglund, and to repay it after the coat was paid for.

But, ah, the beautiful Hortense. The charm of her, the enormous, compelling, weakening delight. And to think that at last, and soon, she was to be his. It was, plainly, of such stuff as dreams are made of—the unbelievable become real.

CHAPTER XVI

TRUE to her promise, the following day Hortense returned to Mr. Rubenstein, and with all the cunning of her nature placed before him, with many reservations, the nature of the dilemma which confronted her. Could she, by any chance, have the coat for one hundred and fifteen dollars on an easy payment plan? Mr. Rubenstein's head forthwith began to wag a solemn negative. This was not an easy payment store. If he wanted to do business that way he could charge two hundred for the coat and easily get it.

"But I could pay as much as fifty dollars when I took the coat," argued Hortense.

"Very good. But who is to guarantee that I get the other sixty-five, and when?"

"Next week twenty-five, and the week after that twenty-five and the week after that fifteen."

"Of course. But supposin' the next day after you take the coat an automobile runs you down and kills you. Then what? How do I get my money?"

Now that was a poser. And there was really no way that she could prove that any one would pay for the coat. And before that there would have to be all the bother of making out a contract, and getting some really responsible person—a banker, say—to endorse it. No, no, this was not an easy payment house. This was a cash house. That was why the coat was offered to her at one hundred and fifteen, but not a dollar less. Not a dollar.

Mr. Rubenstein sighed and talked on. And finally Hortense asked him if she could give him seventy-five dollars cash in hand, the other forty to be paid in one week's time. Would he let her have the coat then—to take home with her?

"But a week—a week—what is a week then?" argued Mr. Rubenstein. "If you can bring me seventy-five next week or to-morrow, and forty more in another week or ten days, why not wait a week and bring the whole hundred and fifteen? Then the coat is yours and no bother. Leave the coat. Come back to-morrow and pay me twenty-five or thirty dollars on account and I take the coat out of the window and lock it up for you.

No one can even see it then. In another week bring me the balance or in two weeks. Then it is yours." Mr. Rubenstein explained the process as though it were a difficult matter to grasp.

But the argument once made was sound enough. It really left Hortense little to argue about. At the same time it reduced her spirit not a little. To think of not being able to take it now. And yet, once out of the place, her vigor revived. For, after all, the time fixed would soon pass and if Clyde performed his part of the agreement promptly, the coat would be hers. The important thing now was to make him give her twenty-five or thirty dollars wherewith to bind this wonderful agreement. Only now, because of the fact that she felt that she needed a new hat to go with the coat, she decided to say that it cost one hundred and twenty-five instead of one hundred and fifteen.

And once this conclusion was put before Clyde, he saw it as a very reasonable arrangement—all things considered—quite a respite from the feeling of strain that had settled upon him after his last conversation with Hortense. For, after all, he had not seen how he was to raise more than thirty-five dollars this first week anyhow. The following week would be somewhat easier, for then, as he told himself, he proposed to borrow twenty or twenty-five from Ratterer if he could, which, joined with the twenty or twenty-five which his tips would bring him, would be quite sufficient to meet the second payment. The week following he proposed to borrow at least ten or fifteen from Hegglund—maybe more—and if that did not make up the required amount to pawn his watch for fifteen dollars, the watch he had bought for himself a few months before. It ought to bring that at least; it cost fifty.

But, he now thought, there was Esta in her wretched room awaiting the most unhappy result of her one romance. How was she to make out, he asked himself, even in the face of the fact that he feared to be included in the financial problem which Esta as well as the family presented. His father was not now, and never had been, of any real financial service to his mother. And yet, if the problem were on this account to be shifted to him, how would he make out? Why need his father always peddle clocks and rugs and preach on the streets? Why couldn't his mother and father give up the mission idea, anyhow?

But, as he knew, the situation was not to be solved without his aid. And the proof of it came toward the end of the second week of his arrangement with Hortense, when, with fifty dollars in his pocket, which he was planning to turn over to her on the following Sunday, his mother, looking into his bedroom where

he was dressing, said: "I'd like to see you for a minute, Clyde, before you go out." He noted she was very grave as she said this. As a matter of fact, for several days past, he had been sensing that she was undergoing a strain of some kind. At the same time he had been thinking all this while that with his own resources hypothecated as they were, he could do nothing. Or, if he did it meant the loss of Hortense. He dared not.

And yet what reasonable excuse could he give his mother for not helping her a little, considering especially the clothes he wore, and the manner in which he had been running here and there, always giving the excuse of working, but probably not deceiving her as much as he thought. To be sure, only two months before, he had obligated himself to pay her ten dollars a week more for five weeks, and had. But that only proved to her very likely that he had so much extra to give, even though he had tried to make it clear at the time that he was pinching himself to do it. And yet, however much he chose to waver in her favor, he could not, with his desire for Hortense directly confronting him.

He went out into the living-room after a time, and as usual his mother at once led the way to one of the benches in the mission—a cheerless, cold room these days.

"I didn't think I'd have to speak to you about this, Clyde, but I don't see any other way out of it. I haven't any one but you to depend upon now that you're getting to be a man. But you must promise not to tell any of the others—Frank or Julia or your father. I don't want them to know. But Esta's back here in Kansas City and in trouble, and I don't know quite what to do about her. I have so very little money to do with, and your father's not very much of a help to me any more."

She passed a weary, reflective hand across her forehead and Clyde knew what was coming. His first thought was to pretend that he did not know that Esta was in the city, since he had been pretending this way for so long. But now, suddenly, in the face of his mother's confession and the need of pretended surprise on his part, if he were to keep up the fiction, he said, "Yes, I know."

"You know?" queried his mother, surprised.

"Yes, I know," Clyde repeated. "I saw you going in that house in Beaudry Street one morning as I was going along there," he announced calmly enough now. "And I saw Esta looking out of the window afterwards, too. So I went in after you left."

"How long ago was that?" she asked, more to gain time than anything else.

"Oh, about five or six weeks ago, I think. I been around to see her a coupla times since then, only Esta didn't want me to say anything about that either."

"Tst! Tst! Tst!" clicked Mrs. Griffiths, with her tongue. "Then you know what the trouble is."

"Yes," replied Clyde.

"Well, what is to be will be," she said resignedly. "You haven't mentioned it to Frank or Julia, have you?"

"No," replied Clyde, thoughtfully, thinking of what a failure his mother had made of her attempt to be secretive. She was no one to deceive any one, or his father, either. He thought himself far, far shrewder.

"Well, you mustn't," cautioned his mother solemnly. "It isn't best for them to know, I think. It's bad enough as it is this way," she added with a kind of wry twist to her mouth, the while Clyde thought of himself and Hortense.

"And to think," she added, after a moment, her eyes filling with a sad, all-enveloping gray mist, "she should have brought all this on herself and on us. And when we have so little to do with, as it is. And after all the instruction she has had—the training. 'The way of the transgressor——' "

She shook her head and put her two large hands together and gripped them firmly, while Clyde stared, thinking of the situation and all that it might mean to him.

She sat there, quite reduced and bewildered by her own peculiar part in all this. She had been as deceiving as any one, really. And here was Clyde, now, fully informed as to her falsehoods and strategy, and herself looking foolish and untrue. But had she not been trying to save him from all this—him and the others? And he was old enough to understand that now. Yet she now proceeded to explain why, and to say how dreadful she felt it all to be. At the same time, as she also explained, now she was compelled to come to him for aid in connection with it.

"Esta's about to be very sick," she went on suddenly and stiffly, not being able, or at least willing, apparently, to look at Clyde as she said it, and yet determined to be as frank as possible. "She'll need a doctor very shortly and some one to be with her all the time when I'm not there. I must get money somewhere—at least fifty dollars. You couldn't get me that much in some way, from some of your young men friends, could you, just a loan for a few weeks? You could pay it back, you know, soon, if you would. You wouldn't need to pay me anything for your room until you had."

She looked at Clyde so tensely, so urgently, that he felt quite

shaken by the force and the cogency of the request. And before he could add anything to the nervous gloom which shadowed her face, she added: "That other money was for her, you know, to bring her back here after her—her"—she hesitated over the appropriate word but finally added—"husband left her there in Pittsburgh. I suppose she told you that."

"Yes, she did," replied Clyde, heavily and sadly. For after all, Esta's condition was plainly critical, which was something that he had not stopped to meditate on before.

"Gee, Ma," he exclaimed, the thought of the fifty dollars in his pocket and its intended destination troubling him considerably—the very sum his mother was seeking. "I don't know whether I can do that or not. I don't know any of the boys down there well enough for that. And they don't make any more than I do, either. I might borrow a little something, but it won't look very good." He choked and swallowed a little, for lying to his mother in this way was not easy. In fact, he had never had occasion to lie in connection with anything so trying—and so despicably. For here was fifty dollars in his pocket at the moment, with Hortense on the one hand and his mother and sister on the other, and the money would solve his mother's problem as fully as it would Hortense's, and more respectably. How terrible it was not to help her. How could he refuse her, really? Nervously he licked his lips and passed a hand over his brow, for a nervous moisture had broken out upon his face. He felt strained and mean and incompetent under the circumstances.

"And you haven't any money of your own right now that you could let me have, have you?" his mother half pleaded. For there were a number of things in connection with Esta's condition which required immediate cash and she had so little.

"No, I haven't, Ma," he said, looking at his mother shamefacedly, for a moment, then away, and if it had not been that she herself was so distrait, she might have seen the falsehood on his face. As it was, he suffered a pang of commingled self-commiseration and self-contempt, based on the distress he felt for his mother. He could not bring himself to think of losing Hortense. He must have her. And yet his mother looked so lone and so resourceless. It was shameful. He was low, really mean. Might he not, later, be punished for a thing like this?

He tried to think of some other way—some way of getting a little money over and above the fifty that might help. If only he had a little more time—a few weeks longer. If only Hortense had not brought up this coat idea just now.

"I'll tell you what I might do," he went on, quite foolishly and dully the while his mother gave vent to a helpless "Tst! Tst! Tst!" "Will five dollars do you any good?"

"Well, it will be something, anyhow," she replied. "I can use it."

"Well, I can let you have that much," he said, thinking to replace it out of his next week's tips and trust to better luck throughout the week. "And I'll see what I can do next week. I might let you have ten then. I can't say for sure. I had to borrow some of that other money I gave you, and I haven't got through paying for that yet, and if I come around trying to get more, they'll think—well, you know how it is."

His mother sighed, thinking of the misery of having to fall back on her one son thus far. And just when he was trying to get a start, too. What would he think of all this in after years? What would he think of her—of Esta—the family? For, for all his ambition and courage and desire to be out and doing, Clyde always struck her as one who was not any too powerful physically or rock-ribbed morally or mentally. So far as his nerves and emotions were concerned, at times he seemed to take after his father more than he did after her. And for the most part it was so easy to excite him—to cause him to show tenseness and strain—as though he were not so very well fitted for either. And it was she, because of Esta and her husband and their joint and unfortunate lives, that was and had been heaping the greater part of this strain on him.

"Well, if you can't, you can't," she said. "I must try and think of some other way." But she saw no clear way at the moment.

CHAPTER XVII

IN connection with the automobile ride suggested and arranged for the following Sunday by Hegglund through his chauffeur friend, a change of plan was announced. The car—an expensive Packard, no less—could not be had for that day, but must be used by this Thursday or Friday, or not at all. For, as had been previously explained to all, but not with the strictest adherence to the truth, the car belonged to a certain Mr. Kimbark, an elderly and very wealthy man who at the time was traveling in Asia. Also, what was not true was that this particular youth was not Mr. Kimbark's chauffeur at all, but rather the rakish, ne'er-do-well son of Sparser, the superintendent of one of Mr. Kimbark's stock farms. This son being anxious to pose as something more than the son of a superintendent of a farm, and as an occasional watchman, having access to the cars, had decided to take the very finest of them and ride in it.

It was Hegglund who proposed that he and his hotel friends be included on some interesting trip. But since the general invitation had been given, word had come that within the next few weeks Mr. Kimbark was likely to return. And because of this, Willard Sparser had decided at once that it might be best not to use the car any more. He might be taken unawares, perhaps, by Mr. Kimbark's unexpected arrival. Laying this difficulty before Hegglund, who was eager for the trip, the latter had scouted the idea. Why not use it once more anyhow? He had stirred up the interest of all of his friends in this and now hated to disappoint them. The following Friday, between noon and six o'clock, was fixed upon as the day. And since Hortense had changed in her plans she now decided to accompany Clyde, who had been invited, of course.

But as Hegglund had explained to Ratterer and Higby since it was being used without the owner's consent, they must meet rather far out—the men in one of the quiet streets near Seventeenth and West Prospect, from which point they could proceed to a meeting place more convenient for the girls, namely, Twentieth and Washington. From thence they would speed via the west Parkway and the Hannibal Bridge north and east to Harlem, North Kansas City, Minaville and so through Liberty and Moseby to Excelsior Springs. Their chief objective there was a little inn—the Wigwam—a mile or two

this side of Excelsior which was open the year round. It was really a combination of restaurant and dancing parlor and hotel. A Victrola and Wurlitzer player-piano furnished the necessary music. Such groups as this were not infrequent, and Hegglund as well as Higby, who had been there on several occasions, described it as dandy. The food was good and the road to it excellent. There was a little river just below it where in the summer time at least there was rowing and fishing. In winter some people skated when there was ice. To be sure, at this time—January—the road was heavily packed with snow, but easy to get over, and the scenery fine. There was a little lake not so far from Excelsior, at this time of year also frozen over, and according to Hegglund, who was always unduly imaginative and high-spirited, they might go there and skate.

"Will you listen to who's talkin' about skatin' on a trip like this?" commented Ratterer, rather cynically, for to his way of thinking this was no occasion for any such side athletics, but for love-making exclusively.

"Aw, hell, can't a fellow have a funny idea even widout bein' roasted for it?" retorted the author of the idea.

The only one, apart from Sparser, who suffered any qualms in connection with all this was Clyde himself. For to him, from the first, the fact that the car to be used did not belong to Sparser, but to his employer, was disturbing, almost irritatingly so. He did not like the idea of taking anything that belonged to any one else, even for temporary use. Something might happen. They might be found out.

"Don't you think it's dangerous for us to be going out in this car?" he asked of Ratterer a few days before the trip and when he fully understood the nature of the source of the car.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Ratterer, who being accustomed to such ideas and devices as this was not much disturbed by them. "I'm not taking the car and you're not, are you? If he wants to take it, that's his lookout, ain't it? If he wants me to go, I'll go. Why wouldn't I? All I want is to be brought back here on time. That's the only thing that would ever worry me."

And Higby, coming up at the moment, had voiced exactly the same sentiments. Yet Clyde remained troubled. It might not work out right; he might lose his job through a thing like this. But so fascinated was he by the thought of riding in such a fine car with Hortense and with all these other girls and boys that he could not resist the temptation to go.

Immediately after noon on the Friday of this particular week

the several participants of the outing were gathered at the points agreed upon. Hegglund, Ratterer, Higby and Clyde at Eighteenth and West Prospect near the railroad yards. Maida Axelrod, Hegglund's girl, Lucille Nickolas, a friend of Ratterer's, and Tina Kogel, a friend of Higby's, also Laura Sipe, another girl who was brought by Tina Kogel to be introduced to Sparser for the occasion, at Twentieth and Washington. Only since Hortense had sent word at the last moment to Clyde that she had to go out to her house for something, and that they were to run out to Forty-ninth and Genesee, where she lived, they did so, but not without grumbling.

The day, a late January one, was inclined to be smoky with lowering clouds, especially within the environs of Kansas City. It even threatened snow at times—a most interesting and picturesque prospect to those within. They liked it.

"Oh, gee, I hope it does," Tina Kogel exclaimed when some one commented on the possibility, and Lucille Nickolas added: "Oh, I just love to see it snow at times." Along the West Bluff Road, Washington and Second Streets, they finally made their way across the Hannibal Bridge to Harlem, and from thence along the winding and hill-sentineled river road to Randolph Heights and Minaville. And beyond that came Moseby and Liberty, to and through which the road bed was better, with interesting glimpses of small homesteads and the bleak snow-covered hills of January.

Clyde, who for all his years in Kansas City had never ventured much beyond Kansas City, Kansas, on the west or the primitive and natural woods of Swope Parks on the east, nor farther along the Kansas or Missouri Rivers than Argentine on the one side and Randolph Heights on the other, was quite fascinated by the idea of travel which appeared to be suggested by all this—distant travel. It was all so different from his ordinary routine. And on this occasion Hortense was inclined to be very genial and friendly. She snuggled down beside him on the seat, and when he, noting that the others had already drawn their girls to them in affectionate embraces, put his arm about her and drew her to him, she made no particular protest. Instead she looked up and said: "I'll have to take my hat off, I guess." The others laughed. There was something about her quick, crisp way which was amusing at times. Besides she had done her hair in a new way which made her look decidedly prettier, and she was anxious to have the others see it.

"Can we dance anywhere out here?" she called to the others, without looking around.

"Surest thing you know," said Higby, who by now had persuaded Tina Kogel to take her hat off and was holding her close. "They got a player-piano and a Victrola out there. If I'd 'a' thought, I'd 'a' brought my cornet. I can play Dixie on that."

The car was speeding at breakneck pace over a snowy white road and between white fields. In fact, Sparser, considering himself a master of car manipulation as well as the real owner of it for the moment, was attempting to see how fast he could go on such a road.

Dark vignettes of woods went by to right and left. Fields away, sentinel hills rose and fell like waves. A wide-armed scarecrow fluttering in the wind, its tall decayed hat awry, stood near at hand in one place. And from near it a flock of crows rose and winged direct toward a distant wood lightly penciled against a foreground of snow.

In the front seat sat Sparser, guiding the car beside Laura Sipe with the air of one to whom such a magnificent car was a commonplace thing. He was really more interested in Hortense, yet felt it incumbent on him, for the time being, anyhow, to show some attention to Laura Sipe. And not to be outdone in gallantry by the others, he now put one arm about Laura Sipe while he guided the car with the other, a feat which troubled Clyde, who was still dubious about the wisdom of taking the car at all. They might all be wrecked by such fast driving. Hortense was only interested by the fact that Sparser had obviously manifested his interest in her; that he had to pay some attention to Laura Sipe whether he wanted to or not. And when she saw him pull her to him and asked her grandly if she had done much automobiling about Kansas City, she merely smiled to herself.

But Ratterer, noting the move, nudged Lucille Nickolas, and she in turn nudged Higby, in order to attract his attention to the affectional development ahead.

"Getting comfortable up front there, Willard?" called Ratterer, genially, in order to make friends with him.

"I'll say I am," replied Sparser, gayly and without turning. "How about you, girlie?"

"Oh, I'm all right," Laura Sipe replied.

But Clyde was thinking that of all the girls present none was really so pretty as Hortense—not nearly. She had come garbed in a red and black dress with a very dark red poke bonnet to match. And on her left cheek, just below her small rouged mouth, she had pasted a minute square of black court plaster in imitation of some picture beauty she had seen. In fact, before the outing began, she had been determined to outshine all the

others present, and distinctly she was now feeling that she was succeeding. And Clyde, for himself, was agreeing with her.

"You're the cutest thing here," whispered Clyde, hugging her fondly.

"Gee, but you can pour on the molasses, kid, when you want to," she called out loud, and the others laughed. And Clyde flushed slightly.

Beyond Minaville about six miles the car came to a bend in a hollow where there was a country store and here Hegglund, Higby and Ratterer got out to fetch candy, cigarettes and ice cream cones and ginger ale. And after that came Liberty, and then several miles this side of Excelsior Springs, they sighted the Wigwam which was nothing more than an old two-story farmhouse snuggled against a rise of ground behind it. There was, however, adjoining it on one side a newer and larger one-story addition consisting of the dining-room, the dance floor, and concealed by a partition at one end, a bar. An open fire flickered cheerfully here in a large fireplace. Down in a hollow across the road might be seen the Benton River or creek, now frozen solid.

"There's your river," called Higby cheerfully as he helped Tina Kogel out of the car, for he was already very much warmed by several drinks he had taken en route. They all paused for a moment to admire the stream, winding away among the trees. "I wanted dis bunch to bring dere skates and go down dere," sighed Hegglund, "but dey wouldn't. Well, dat's all right."

By then Lucille Nickolas, seeing a flicker of flame reflected in one of the small windows of the inn, called, "Oh, see, they gotta fire."

The car was parked, and they all trooped into the inn, and at once Higby briskly went over and started the large, noisy, clattery, tinny Nickelodeon with a nickel. And to rival him, and for a prank, Hegglund ran to the victrola which stood in one corner and put on a record of "The Grizzly Bear," which he found lying there.

At the first sounds of this strain, which they all knew, Tina Kogel called: "Oh, let's all dance to that, will you? Can't you stop that other old thing?" she added.

"Sure, after it runs down," explained Ratterer, laughingly. "The only way to stop that thing is not to feed it any nickels."

But now a waiter coming in, Higby began to inquire what everybody wanted. And in the meantime, to show off her charms, Hortense had taken the center of the floor and was attempting to imitate a grizzly bear walking on its hind legs,

which she could do amusingly enough—quite gracefully. And Sparser, seeing her alone in the center of the floor and anxious to interest her now, followed her and tried to imitate her motions from behind. Finding him clever at it, and anxious to dance, she finally abandoned the imitation and giving him her arms went one-stepping about the room most vividly. At once, Clyde, who was by no means as good a dancer, became jealous—painfully so. In his eagerness for her, it seemed unfair to him that he should be deserted by her so early—at the very beginning of things. But she, becoming interested in Sparser, who seemed more worldly-wise, paid no attention at all to Clyde for the time being, but went dancing with her new conquest, his rhythmic skill seeming charmingly to match her own. And then, not to be out of it, the others at once chose partners, Hegglund dancing with Maida, Ratterer with Lucille and Higby with Tina Kogel. This left Laura Sipe for Clyde, who did not like her very much. She was not as perfect as she might be—a plump, pudgy-faced girl with inadequate sensual blue eyes—and Clyde, lacking any exceptional skill, they danced nothing but the conventional one-step while the others were dipping and lurching and spinning.

In a kind of sick fury, Clyde noticed that Sparser, who was still with Hortense, was by now holding her close and looking straight into her eyes. And she was permitting him. It gave him a feeling of lead at the pit of his stomach. Was it possible she was beginning to like this young upstart who had this car? And she had promised to like him for the present. It brought to him a sense of her fickleness—the probability of her real indifference to him. He wanted to do something—stop dancing and get her away from Sparser, but there was no use until this particular record ran out.

And then, just at the end of this, the waiter returned with a tray and put down cocktails, ginger ale and sandwiches upon three small tables which had been joined together. All but Sparser and Hortense quit and came toward it—a fact which Clyde was quick to note. She was a heartless flirt! She really did not care for him after all. And after making him think that she did, so recently—and getting him to help her with that coat. She could go to the devil now. He would show her. And he waiting for her! Wasn't that the limit? Yet, finally, seeing that the others were gathering about the tables, which had been placed near the fire, Hortense and Sparser ceased dancing and approached. Clyde was white and glum. He stood to one side, seemingly indifferent. And Laura Sipe, who had already noted his rage and understood the reason now moved away from

him to join Tina Kogel, to whom she explained why he was so angry.

And then noting his glumness, Hortense came over, executing a phase of the "Grizzly" as she did so.

"Gee, wasn't that swell?" she began. "Gee, how I do love to dance to music like that!"

"Sure, it's swell for you," returned Clyde, burning with envy and disappointment.

"Why, what's the trouble?" she asked, in a low and almost injured tone, pretending not to guess, yet knowing quite well why he was angry. "You don't mean to say that you're mad because I danced with him first, do you? Oh, how silly! Why didn't you come over then and dance with me? I couldn't refuse to dance with him when he was right there, could I?"

"Oh, no, of course, you couldn't," replied Clyde sarcastically, and in a low, tense tone, for he, no more than Hortense, wanted the others to hear. "But you didn't have to fall all over him and dream in his eyes, either, did you?" He was fairly blazing. "You needn't say you didn't, because I saw you."

At this she glanced at him oddly, realizing not only the sharpness of his mood, but that this was the first time he had shown so much daring in connection with her. It must be that he was getting to feel too sure of her. She was showing him too much attention. At the same time she realized that this was not the time to show him that she did not care for him as much as she would like to have him believe, since she wanted the coat, already agreed upon.

"Oh, gee, well, ain't that the limit?" she replied angrily, yet more because she was irritated by the fact that what he said was true than anything else. "If you aren't the grouch. Well, I can't help it, if you're going to be as jealous as that. I didn't do anything but dance with him just a little. I didn't think you'd be mad." She moved as if to turn away, but realizing that there was an understanding between them, and that he must be placated if things were to go on, she drew him by his coat lapels out of the range of the hearing of the others, who were already looking and listening, and began.

"Now, see here, you. Don't go acting like this. I didn't mean anything by what I did. Honest, I didn't. Anyhow, everybody dances like that now. And nobody means anything by it. Aren't you goin' to let me be nice to you like I said, or are you?"

And now she looked him coaxingly and winsomely and calculatingly straight in the eye, as though he were the one person

among all these present whom she really did like. And deliberately, and of a purpose, she made a pursy, sensuous mouth—the kind she could make—and practised a play of the lips that caused them to seem to want to kiss him—a mouth that tempted him to distraction.

"All right," he said, looking at her weakly and yieldingly. "I suppose I am a fool, but I saw what you did, all right. You know I'm crazy about you, Hortense—just wild! I can't help it. I wish I could sometimes. I wish I wouldn't be such a fool." And he looked at her and was sad. And she, realizing her power over him and how easy it was to bring him around, replied: "Oh, you—you don't, either. I'll kiss you after a while, when the others aren't looking if you'll be good." At the same time she was conscious of the fact that Sparser's eyes were upon her. Also that he was intensely drawn to her and that she liked him more than any one she had recently encountered.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE climax of the afternoon was reached, however, when after several more dances and drinks, the small river and its possibilities was again brought to the attention of all by Hegglund, who, looking out of one of the windows, suddenly exclaimed: "What's de matter wit de ice down dere? Look at de swell ice. I dare dis crowd to go down dere and slide."

They were off pell-mell—Ratterer and Tina Kogel, running hand in hand, Sparser and Lucille Nickolas, with whom he had just been dancing, Higby and Laura Sipe, whom he was finding interesting enough for a change, and Clyde and Hortense. But once on the ice, which was nothing more than a narrow, winding stream, blown clean in places by the wind, and curving among thickets of leafless trees, the company were more like young satyrs and nymphs of an older day. They ran here and there, slipping and sliding—Higby, Lucille and Maida immediately falling down, but scrambling to their feet with bursts of laughter.

And Hortense, aided by Clyde at first, minced here and there. But soon she began to run and slide, squealing in pretended fear. And now, not only Sparser but Higby, and this in spite of Clyde, began to show Hortense attention. They joined her in sliding, ran after her and pretended to try to trip her up, but caught her as she fell. And Sparser, taking her by the hand, dragged her, seemingly in spite of herself and the others, far upstream and about a curve where they could not be seen. Determined not to show further watchfulness or jealousy Clyde remained behind. But he could not help feeling that Sparser might be taking this occasion to make a date, even to kiss her. She was not incapable of letting him, even though she might pretend to him that she did not want him to. It was agonizing.

In spite of himself, he began to tingle with helpless pain—to begin to wish that he could see them. But Hegglund, having called every one to join hands and crack the whip, he took the hand of Lucille Nickolas, who was holding on to Hegglund's, and gave his other free hand to Maida Axelrod, who in turn gave her free hand to Ratterer. And Higby and Laura Sipe were about to make up the tail when Sparser and Hortense came gliding back—he holding her by the hand. And they now

tacked on at the foot. Then Hegglund and the others began running and doubling back and forth until all beyond Maida had fallen and let go. And, as Clyde noted, Hortense and Sparser, in falling, skidded and rolled against each other to the edge of the shore where were snow and leaves and twigs. And Hortense's skirts, becoming awry in some way, moved up to above her knees. But instead of showing any embarrassment, as Clyde thought and wished she might, she sat there for a few moments without shame and even laughing heartily—and Sparser with her and still holding her hand. And Laura Sipe, having fallen in such a way as to trip Higby, who had fallen across her, they also lay there laughing and yet in a most suggestive position, as Clyde thought. He noted, too, that Laura Sipe's skirts had been worked above her knees. And Sparser, now sitting up, was pointing to her pretty legs and laughing loudly, showing most of his teeth. And all the others were emitting peals and squeals of laughter.

"Hang it all!" thought Clyde. "Why the deuce does he always have to be hanging about her? Why didn't he bring a girl of his own if he wanted to have a good time? What right have they got to go where they can't be seen? And she thinks I think she means nothing by all this. She never laughs that heartily with me, you bet. What does she think I am that she can put that stuff over on me, anyhow?" He glowered darkly for the moment, but in spite of his thoughts the line or whip was soon re-formed and this time with Lucille Nickolas still holding his hand. Sparser and Hortense at the tail end again. But Hegglund, unconscious of the mood of Clyde and thinking only of the sport, called: "Better let some one else take de end dere, hadn'tcha?" And feeling the fairness of this, Ratterer and Maida Axelrod and Clyde and Lucille Nickolas now moved down with Higby and Laura Sipe and Hortense and Sparser above them. Only, as Clyde noted, Hortense still held Sparser by the hand, yet she moved just above him and took his hand, he being to the right, with Sparser next above to her left, holding her other hand firmly, which infuriated Clyde. Why couldn't he stick to Laura Sipe, the girl brought out here for him? And Hortense was encouraging him.

He was very sad, and he felt so angry and bitter that he could scarcely play the game. He wanted to stop and quarrel with Sparser. But so brisk and eager was Hegglund that they were off before he could even think of doing so.

And then, try as he would, to keep his balance in the face of this, he and Lucille and Ratterer and Maida Axelrod were

thrown down and spun around on the ice like curling irons. And Hortense, letting go of him at the right moment, seemed to prefer deliberately to hang on to Sparser. Entangled with these others, Clyde and they spun across forty feet of smooth, green ice and piled against a snow bank. At the finish, as he found, Lucille Nickolas was lying across his knees face down in such a spanking position that he was compelled to laugh. And Maida Axelrod was on her back, next to Ratterer, her legs straight up in the air; on purpose he thought. She was too coarse and bold for him. And there followed, of course, squeals and guffaws of delight—so loud that they could be heard for half a mile. Hegglund, intensely susceptible to humor at all times, doubled to the knees, slapped his thighs and bawled. And Sparser opened his big mouth and chortled and grimaced until he was scarlet. So infectious was the result that for the time being Clyde forgot his jealousy. He too looked and laughed. But Clyde's mood had not changed really. He still felt that she wasn't playing fair.

At the end of all this playing Lucille Nickolas and Tina Kogel being tired, dropped out. And Hortense, also. Clyde at once left the group to join her. Ratterer then followed Lucille. Then the others separating, Hegglund pushed Maida Axelrod before him down stream out of sight around a bend. Higby, seemingly taking his cue from this, pulled Tina Kogel up stream, and Ratterer and Lucille, seeming to see something of interest, struck into a thicket, laughing and talking as they went. Even Sparser and Laura, left to themselves, now wandered off, leaving Clyde and Hortense alone.

And then, as these two wandered toward a fallen log which here paralleled the stream, she sat down. But Clyde, smarting from his fancied wounds, stood silent for the time being, while she, sensing as much, took him by the belt of his coat and began to pull at him.

"Giddap, horsey," she played. "Giddap. My horsey has to skate me now on the ice."

Clyde looked at her glumly, glowering mentally, and not to be diverted so easily from the ills which he felt to be his.

"Whadd'ye wanta let that fellow Sparser always hang around you for?" he demanded. "I saw you going up the creek there with him a while ago. What did he say to you up there?"

"He didn't say anything."

"Oh, no, of course not," he replied cynically and bitterly. "And maybe he didn't kiss you, either."

"I should say not," she replied definitely and spitefully, "I'd like to know what you think I am, anyhow. I don't let people kiss me the first time they see me, smarty, and I want you to know it. I didn't let you, did I?"

"Oh, that's all right, too," answered Clyde; "but you didn't like me as well as you do him, either."

"Oh, didn't I? Well, maybe I didn't, but what right have you to say I like him, anyhow. I'd like to know if I can't have a little fun without you watching me all the time. You make me tired, that's what you do." She was quite angry now because of the proprietary air he appeared to be assuming.

And now Clyde, repulsed and somewhat shaken by this sudden counter on her part, decided on the instant that perhaps it might be best for him to modify his tone. After all, she had never said that she had really cared for him, even in the face of the implied promise she had made him.

"Oh, well," he observed glumly after a moment, and not without a little of sadness in his tone, "I know one thing. If I let on that I cared for any one as much as you say you do for me at times, I wouldn't want to flirt around with others like you are doing out here."

"Oh, wouldn't you?"

"No, I wouldn't."

"Well, who's flirting anyhow, I'd like to know?"

"You are."

"I'm not either, and I wish you'd just go away and let me alone if you can't do anything else but quarrel with me. Just because I danced with him up there in the restaurant, is no reason for you to think I'm flirting. Oh, you make me tired, that's what you do."

"Do I?"

"Yes, you do."

"Well, maybe I better go off and not bother you any more at all then," he returned, a trace of his mother's courage welling up in him.

"Well, maybe you had, if that's the way you're going to feel about me all the time," she answered, and kicked viciously with her toes at the ice. But Clyde was beginning to feel that he could not possibly go through with this—that after all he was too eager about her—too much at her feet. He began to weaken and gaze nervously at her. And she, thinking of her coat again, decided to be civil.

"You didn't look in his eyes, did you?" he asked weakly, his thoughts going back to her dancing with Sparser.

"When?"

"When you were dancing with him?"

"No, I didn't, not that I know of, anyhow. But supposing I did. What of it? I didn't mean anything by it. Gee, criminy, can't a person look in anybody's eyes if they want to?"

"In the way you looked in his? Not if you claim to like anybody else, I say." And the skin of Clyde's forehead lifted and sank, and his eyelids narrowed. Hortense merely clicked impatiently and indignantly with her tongue.

"Tst! Tst! Tst! If you ain't the limit!"

"And a while ago back there on the ice," went on Clyde determinedly and yet pathetically. "When you came back from up there, instead of coming up to where I was you went to the foot of the line with him. I saw you. And you held his hand, too, all the way back. And then when you fell down, you had to sit there with him holding your hand. I'd like to know what you call that if it ain't flirting. What else is it? I'll bet he thinks it is, all right."

"Well, I wasn't flirting with him just the same and I don't care what you say. But if you want to have it that way, have it that way. I can't stop you. You're so darn jealous you don't want to let anybody else do anything, that's all the matter with you. How else can you play on the ice if you don't hold hands, I'd like to know? Gee, criminy! What about you and that Lucille Nickolas? I saw her laying across your lap and you laughing. And I didn't think anything of that. What do you want me to do—come out here and sit around like a bump on a log?—follow you around like a tail? Or you follow me? What-a-yuh think I am anyhow? A nut?"

She was being ragged by Clyde, as she thought, and she didn't like it. She was thinking of Sparser who was really more appealing to her at the time than Clyde. He was more materialistic, less romantic, more direct.

He turned and, taking off his cap, rubbed his head gloomily while Hortense, looking at him, thought first of him and then of Sparser. Sparser was more manly, not so much of a crybaby. He wouldn't stand around and complain this way, you bet. He'd probably leave her for good, have nothing more to do with her. Yet Clyde, after his fashion, was interesting and useful. Who else would do for her what he had? And at any rate, he was not trying to force her to go off with him now as these others had gone and as she had feared he might try to do—ahead of her plan and wish. This quarrel was obviating that.

"Now, see here," she said after a time, having decided that it was best to assuage him and that it was not so hard to manage him after all. "Are we goin' t' fight all the time, Clyde? What's the use, anyhow? Whatja want me to come out here for if you just want to fight with me all the time? I wouldn't have come if I'd 'a' thought you were going to that all day."

She turned and kicked at the ice with the minute toe of her shoes, and Clyde, always taken by her charm again, put his arms about her, and crushed her to him, at the same time fumbling at her breasts and putting his lips to hers and endeavoring to hold and fondle her. But now, because of her suddenly developed liking for Sparser, and partially because of her present mood towards Clyde, she broke away, a dissatisfaction with herself and him troubling her. Why should she let him force her to do anything she did not feel like doing, just now, anyhow, she now asked herself. She hadn't agreed to be as nice to him to-day as he might wish. Not yet. At any rate just now she did not want to be handled in this way by him, and she would not, regardless of what he might do. And Clyde, sensing by now what the true state of her mind in regard to him must be, stepped back and yet continued to gaze gloomily and hungrily at her. And she in turn merely stared at him.

"I thought you said you liked me," he demanded almost savagely now, realizing that his dreams of a happy outing this day were fading into nothing.

"Well, I do when you're nice," she replied, sly and evasively, seeking some way to avoid complication in connection with her original promises to him.

"Yes, you do," he grumbled. "I see how you do. Why, here we are out here now and you won't even let me touch you. I'd like to know what you meant by all that you said, anyhow."

"Well, what did I say?" she countered, merely to gain time.

"As though you didn't know."

"Oh, well. But that wasn't to be right away, either, was it? I thought we said"—she paused dubiously.

"I know what you said," he went on. "But I notice now that you don't like me an' that's all there is to it. What difference would it make if you really cared for me whether you were nice to me now or next week or the week after? Gee whiz, you'd think it was something that depended on what I did for you, not whether you cared for me." In his pain he was quite intense and courageous.

"That's not so!" she snapped, angrily and bitterly, irritated by the truth of what he said. "And I wish you wouldn't say

that to me, either. I don't care anything about the old coat now, if you want to know it. And you can just have your old money back, too, I don't want it. And you can just let me alone from now on, too," she added. "I'll get all the coats I want without any help from you." At this, she turned and walked away.

But Clyde, now anxious to mollify her as usual, ran after her. "Don't go, Hortense," he pleaded. "Wait a minute. I didn't mean that either, honest I didn't. I'm crazy about you. Honest I am. Can't you see that? Oh, gee, don't go now. I'm not giving you the money to get something for it. You can have it for nothing if you want it that way. There ain't anybody else in the world like you to me, and there never has been. You can have the money for all I care, all of it. I don't want it back. But, gee, I did think you liked me a little. Don't you care for me at all, Hortense?" He looked cowed and frightened, and she, sensing her mastery over him, relented a little.

"Of course I do," she announced. "But just the same, that don't mean that you can treat me any old way, either. You don't seem to understand that a girl can't do everything you want her to do just when you want her to do it."

"Just what do you mean by that?" asked Clyde, not quite sensing just what she did mean. "I don't get you."

"Oh, yes, you do, too." She could not believe that he did not know.

"Oh, I guess I know what you're talkin' about. I know what you're going to say now," he went on disappointedly. "That's that old stuff they all pull. I know."

He was now reciting almost verbatim the words and intonations even of the other boys at the hotel—Higby, Ratterer, Eddie Doyle—who, having narrated the nature of such situations to him, and how girls occasionally lied out of pressing dilemmas in this way, had made perfectly clear to him what was meant. And Hortense knew now that he did know.

"Gee, but you're mean," she said in an assumed hurt way. "A person can never tell you anything or expect you to believe it. Just the same, it's true, whether you believe it or not."

"Oh, I know how you are," he replied, sadly yet a little loftily, as though this were an old situation to him. "You don't like me, that's all. I see that now, all right."

"Gee, but you're mean," she persisted, affecting an injured air. "It's the God's truth. Believe me or not, I swear it. Honest it is."

Clyde stood there. In the face of this small trick there was

really nothing much to say as he saw it. He could not force her to do anything. If she wanted to lie and pretend, he would have to pretend to believe her. And yet a great sadness settled down upon him. He was not to win her after all—that was plain. He turned, and she, being convinced that he felt that she was lying now, felt it incumbent upon herself to do something about it—to win him around to her again.

"Please, Clyde, please," she began now, most artfully, "I mean that. Really, I do. Won't you believe me? But I will next week, sure. Honest, I will. Won't you believe that? I meant everything I said when I said it. Honest, I did. I do like you—a lot. Won't you believe that, too—please?"

And Clyde, thrilled from head to toe by this latest phase of her artistry, agreed that he would. And once more he began to smile and recover his gayety. And by the time they reached the car, to which they were all called a few minutes after by Hegglund, because of the time, and he had held her hand and kissed her often, he was quite convinced that the dream he had been dreaming was as certain of fulfillment as anything could be. Oh, the glory of it when it should come true!

CHAPTER XIX

FOR the major portion of the return trip to Kansas City, there was nothing to mar the very agreeable illusion under which Clyde rested. He sat beside Hortense, who leaned her head against his shoulder. And although Sparser, who had waited for the others to step in before taking the wheel, had squeezed her arm and received an answering and promising look, Clyde had not seen that.

But the hour being late and the admonitions of Hegglund, Ratterer and Higby being all for speed, and the mood of Sparser, because of the looks bestowed upon him by Hortense, being the gayest and most drunken, it was not long before the outlying lamps of the environs began to show. For the car was rushed along the road at break-neck speed. At one point, however, where one of the eastern trunk lines approached the city, there was a long and unexpected and disturbing wait at a grade crossing where two freight trains met and passed. Farther in, at North Kansas City, it began to snow, great soft slushy flakes, feathering down and coating the road surface with a slippery layer of mud which required more caution than had been thus far displayed. It was then half past five. Ordinarily, an additional eight minutes at high speed would have served to bring the car within a block or two of the hotel. But now, with another delay near Hannibal Bridge owing to grade crossing, it was twenty minutes to six before the bridge was crossed and Wyandotte Street reached. And already all four of these youths had lost all sense of the delight of the trip and the pleasure the companionship of these girls had given them. For already they were worrying as to the probability of their reaching the hotel in time. The smug and martinetish figure of Mr. Squires loomed before them all.

"Gee, if we don't do better than this," observed Ratterer to Higby, who was nervously fumbling with his watch, "we're not goin' to make it. We'll hardly have time, as it is, to change."

Clyde, hearing him, exclaimed: "Oh, crickets! I wish we could hurry a little. Gee, I wish now we hadn't come to-day. It'll be tough if we don't get there on time."

And Hortense, noting his sudden tenseness and unrest, added: "Don't you think you'll make it all right?"

"Not this way," he said. But Hegglund, who had been studying the flaked air outside, a world that seemed dotted with

falling bits of cotton, called: "Eh, dere Willard. We certainly gotta do better dan dis. It means de razoo for us if we don't get dere on time."

And Higby, for once stirred out of a gambler-like effrontery and calm, added: "We'll walk the plank all right unless we can put up some good yarn. Can't anybody think of anything?" As for Clyde, he merely sighed nervously.

And then, as though to torture them the more, an unexpected crush of vehicles appeared at nearly every intersection. And Sparser, who was irritated by this particular predicament, was contemplating with impatience the warning hand of a traffic policeman, which, at the intersection of Ninth and Wyandotte, had been raised against him. "There goes his mit again," he exclaimed. "What can I do about that! I might turn over to Washington, but I don't know whether we'll save any time by going over there."

A full minute passed before he was signaled to go forward. Then swiftly he swung the car to the right and three blocks over into Washington Street.

But here the conditions were no better. Two heavy lines of traffic moved in opposite directions. And at each succeeding corner several precious moments were lost as the cross-traffic went by. Then the car would tear on to the next corner, weaving its way in and out as best it could.

At Fifteenth and Washington, Clyde exclaimed to Ratterer: "How would it do if we got out at Seventeenth and walked over?"

"You won't save any time if I can turn over there," called Sparser. "I can get over there quicker than you can."

He crowded the other cars for every inch of available space. At Sixteenth and Washington, seeing what he considered a fairly clear block to the left, he turned the car and tore along that thoroughfare to as far as Wyandotte once more. Just as he neared the corner and was about to turn at high speed, swinging in close to the curb to do so, a little girl of about nine, who was running toward the crossing, jumped directly in front of the moving machine. And because there was no opportunity given him to turn and avoid her, she was struck and dragged a number of feet before the machine could be halted. At the same time, there arose piercing screams from at least half a dozen women, and shouts from as many men who had witnessed the accident.

Instantly they all rushed toward the child, who had been thrown under and passed over by the wheels. And Sparser, look-

ing out and seeing them gathering about the fallen figure, was seized with an uninterpretable mental panic which conjured up the police, jail, his father, the owner of the car, severe punishment in many forms. And though by now all the others in the car were up and giving vent to anguished exclamations such as "Oh, God! He hit a little girl"; "Oh, gee, he's killed a kid!" "Oh, mercy!" "Oh, Lord!" "Oh, heavens, what'll we do now?" he turned and exclaimed: "Jesus, the cops! I gotta get outa this with this car."

And, without consulting the others, who were still half standing, but almost speechless with fear, he shot the lever into first, second and then high, and giving the engine all the gas it would endure, sped with it to the next corner beyond.

But there, as at the other corners in this vicinity, a policeman was stationed, and having already seen some commotion at the corner west of him, had already started to leave his post in order to ascertain what it was. As he did so, cries of "Stop that car"—"Stop that car"—reached his ears. And a man, running toward the sedan from the scene of the accident, pointed to it, and called: "Stop that car, stop that car. They've killed a child."

Then gathering what was meant, he turned toward the car, putting his police whistle to his mouth as he did so. But Sparser, having by this time heard the cries and seen the policeman leaving, dashed swiftly past him into Seventeenth Street, along which he sped at almost forty miles an hour, grazing the hub of a truck in one instance, scraping the fender of an automobile in another, and missing by inches and quarter inches vehicles or pedestrians, while those behind him in the car were for the most part sitting bolt upright and tense, their eyes wide, their hands clenched, their faces and lips set—or, as in the case of Hortense and Lucille Nickolas and Tina Kogel, giving voice to repeated, "Oh, Gods!" "Oh, what's going to happen now?"

But the police and those who had started to pursue were not to be outdone so quickly. Unable to make out the license plate number and seeing from the first motions of the car that it had no intention of stopping, the officer blew a loud and long blast on his police whistle. And the policeman at the next corner seeing the car speed by and realizing what it meant, blew on his whistle, then stopped, and springing on the running board of a passing touring car ordered it to give chase. And at this, seeing what was amiss or awind, three other cars, driven by adventurous spirits, joined in the chase, all honking loudly as they came.

But the Packard had far more speed in it than any of its pursuers, and although for the first few blocks of the pursuit there were cries of "Stop that car!" "Stop that car!" still, owing to the much greater speed of the car, these soon died away, giving place to the long wild shrieks of distant horns in full cry.

Sparser by now having won a fair lead and realizing that a straight course was the least baffling to pursue, turned swiftly into McGee, a comparatively quiet thoroughfare along which he tore for a few blocks to the wide and winding Gillham Parkway, whose course was southward. But having followed that at terrific speed for a short distance, he again—at Thirty-first—decided to turn—the houses in the distance confusing him and the suburban country to the north seeming to offer the best opportunity for evading his pursuers. And so now he swung the car to the left into that thoroughfare, his thought here being that amid these comparatively quiet streets it was possible to wind in and out and so shake off pursuit—at least long enough to drop his passengers somewhere and return the car to the garage.

And this he would have been able to do had it not been for the fact that in turning into one of the more outlying streets of this region, where there were scarcely any houses and no pedestrians visible, he decided to turn off his lights, the better to conceal the whereabouts of the car. Then, still speeding east, north, and east and south by turns, he finally dashed into one street where, after a few hundred feet, the pavement suddenly ended. But because another cross street was visible a hundred feet or so further on, and he imagined that by turning into that he might find a paved thoroughfare again, he sped on and then swung sharply to the left, only to crash roughly into a pile of paving stones left by a contractor who was preparing to pave the way. In the absence of the lights he had failed to distinguish this. And diagonally opposite to these, lengthwise of a prospective sidewalk, had been laid a pile of lumber for a house.

Striking the edge of the paving stones at high speed, he caromed, and all but upsetting the car, made directly for the lumber pile opposite, into which he crashed. Only instead of striking it head on, the car struck one end, causing it to give way and spread out, but only sufficiently to permit the right wheels to mount high upon it and so throw the car completely over onto its left side in the grass and snow beyond the walk. Then there, amid a crash of glass and the impacts of their own bodies, the occupants were thrown down in a heap, forward and to the left.

What happened afterwards was more or less of a mystery and a matter of confusion, not only to Clyde, but to all the others. For Sparser and Laura Sipe, being in front, were dashed against the wind-shield and the roof and knocked senseless, Sparser, having his shoulder, hip and left knee wrenched in such a way as to make it necessary to let him lie in the car as he was until an ambulance arrived. He could not possibly be lifted out through the door, which was in the roof as the car now lay. And in the second seat, Clyde, being nearest the door to the left and next to him Hortense, Lucille Nickolas and Ratterer, was pinioned under and yet not crushed by their combined weights. For Hortense in falling had been thrown completely over him on her side against the roof, which was now the left wall. And Lucille, next above her, fell in such a way as to lie across Clyde's shoulders only, while Ratterer, now topmost of the four, had, in falling, been thrown over the seat in front of him. But grasping the steering wheel in front of him as he fell, the same having been wrenched from Sparser's hands, he had broken his fall in part by clinging to it. But even so, his face and hands were cut and bruised and his shoulder, arm and hip slightly wrenched, yet not sufficiently to prevent his being of assistance to the others. For at once, realizing the plight of the others as well as his own, and stirred by their screams, Ratterer was moved to draw himself up and out through the top or side door which he now succeeded in opening, scrambling over the others to reach it.

Once out, he climbed upon the chassis beam of the toppled car, and, reaching down, caught hold of the struggling and moaning Lucille, who like the others was trying to climb up but could not. And exerting all his strength and exclaiming, "Be still, now, honey, I gotcha. You're all right, I'll getcha out," he lifted her to a sitting position on the side of the door, then down in the snow, where he placed her and where she sat crying and feeling her arms and her head. And after her he helped Hortense, her left cheek and forehead and both hands badly bruised and bleeding, but not seriously, although she did not know that at the time. She was whimpering and shivering and shaking—a nervous chill having succeeded the dazed and almost unconscious state which had followed the first crash.

At that moment, Clyde, lifting his bewildered head above the side door of the car, his left cheek, shoulder and arm bruised, but not otherwise injured, was thinking that he too must get out of this as quickly as possible. A child had been killed; a car stolen and wrecked; his job was most certainly lost; the police

were in pursuit and might even find them there at any minute. And below him in the car was Sparser, prone where he fell, but already being looked to by Ratterer. And beside him Laura Sipe, also unconscious. He felt called upon to do something—to assist Ratterer, who was reaching down and trying to lay hold of Laura Sipe without injuring her. But so confused were his thoughts that he would have stood there without helping any one had it not been for Ratterer, who called most irritably, "Give us a hand here, Clyde, will you? Let's see if we can get her out. She's fainted." And Clyde, turning now instead of trying to climb out, began to seek to lift her from within, standing on the broken glass window of the side beneath his feet and attempting to draw her body back and up off the body of Sparser. But this was not possible. She was too limp—too heavy. He could only draw her back—off the body of Sparser—and then let her rest there, between the second and first seats on the car's side.

But, meanwhile, at the back, Hegglund, being nearest the top and only slightly stunned, had managed to reach the door nearest him and throw it back. Thus, by reason of his athletic body, he was able to draw himself up and out, saying as he did so: "Oh, Jesus, what a finish! Oh, Christ, dis is de limit! Oh, Jesus, we better beat it outa dis before de cops git here."

At the same time, however, seeing the others below him and hearing their cries, he could not contemplate anything so desperate as desertion. Instead, once out, he turned and making out Maida below him, exclaimed: "Here, for Christ's sake, gimme your hand. We gotta get outa dis, and dam quick, I tell ya." Then turning from Maida, who for the moment was feeling her wounded and aching head, he mounted the top chassis beam again and, reaching down, caught hold of Tina Kogel, who, only stunned, was trying to push herself to a sitting position while resting heavily on top of Higby. But he, relieved of the weight of the others, was already kneeling, and feeling his head and face with his hands.

"Gimme your hand, Dave," called Hegglund. "Hurry! For Christ's sake! We ain't got no time to lose around here. Are ya hurt? Christ, we gotta git outa here, I tellya. I see a guy comin' acrost dere now an' I doughno wedder he's a cop or not." He started to lay hold of Higby's left hand, but as he did so Higby repulsed him.

"Huh, uh," he exclaimed. "Don't pull. I'm all right. I'll get out by myself. Help the others." And standing up, his head above the level of the door, he began to look about within the car for something on which to place his foot. The back

cushion having fallen out and forward, he got his foot on that and raised himself up to the door level on which he sat and drew out his leg. Then looking about, and seeing Hegglund attempting to assist Ratterer and Clyde with Sparser, he went to their aid.

Outside, some odd and confusing incidents had already occurred. For Hortense, who had been lifted out before Clyde, and had suddenly begun to feel her face, had as suddenly realized that her left cheek and forehead were not only scraped but bleeding. And being seized by the notion that her beauty might have been permanently marred by this accident, she was at once thrown into a state of selfish panic which caused her to become completely oblivious, not only to the misery and injury of the others, but to the danger of discovery by the police, the injury to the child, the wreck of this expensive car—in fact everything but herself and the probability or possibility that her beauty had been destroyed. She began to whimper on the instant and wave her hands up and down. "Oh, goodness, goodness, goodness!" she exclaimed desperately. "Oh, how dreadful! Oh, how terrible! Oh, my face is all cut." And feeling an urgent compulsion to do something about it, she suddenly set off (and that without a word to any one and while Clyde was still inside helping Ratterer) south along 35th Street, toward the city where were lights and more populated streets. Her one thought was to reach her own home as speedily as possible in order that she might be able to do something for herself.

Of Clyde, Sparser, Ratterer and the other girls—she really thought nothing. What were they now? It was only intermittently and between thoughts of her marred beauty that she could even bring herself to think of the injured child—the horror of which, as well as the pursuit by the police, maybe, the fact that the car did not belong to Sparser or that it was wrecked, and that they were all liable to arrest in consequence, affecting her but slightly. Her one thought in regard to Clyde was that he was the one who had invited her to this ill-fated journey—hence that he was to blame, really. Those beastly boys—to think they should have gotten her into this and then didn't have brains enough to manage better.

The other girls, apart from Laura Sipe, were not seriously injured—any of them. They were more frightened than anything else, but now that this had happened they were in a panic, lest they be overtaken by the police, arrested, exposed and punished. And accordingly they stood about, exclaiming

"Oh, gee, hurry, can't you? Oh, dear, we ought all of us to get away from here. Oh, it's all so terrible." Until at last Hegglund exclaimed: "For Christ's sake, keep quiet, cantcha? We're doin' de best we can, cantcha see? You'll have de cops down on us in a minute as it is."

And then, as if in answer to his comment, a lone suburbanite who lived some four blocks from the scene across the fields and who, hearing the crash and the cries in the night, had ambled across to see what the trouble was, now drew near and stood curiously looking at the stricken group and the car.

"Had an accident, eh?" he exclaimed, genially enough. "Any one badly hurt? Gee, that's too bad. And that's a swell car, too. Can I help any?"

Clyde, hearing him talk and looking out and not seeing Hortense anywhere, and not being able to do more for Sparser than stretch him in the bottom of the car, glanced agonizingly about. For the thought of the police and their certain pursuit was strong upon him. He must get out of this. He must not be caught here. Think of what would happen to him if he were caught—how he would be disgraced and punished probably—all his fine world stripped from him before he could say a word really. His mother would hear—Mr. Squires—everybody. Most certainly he would go to jail. Oh, how terrible that thought was—grinding really like a macerating wheel to his flesh. They could do nothing more for Sparser, and they only laid themselves open to being caught by lingering. So asking, "Where'd Miss Briggs go?" he now began to climb out, then started looking about the dark and snowy fields for her. His thought was that he would first assist her to wherever she might desire to go.

But just then in the distance was heard the horns and the hum of at least two motorcycles speeding swiftly in the direction of this very spot. For already the wife of the suburbanite, on hearing the crash and the cries in the distance, had telephoned the police that an accident had occurred here. And now the suburbanite was explaining: "That's them. I told the wife to telephone for an ambulance." And hearing this, all these others now began to run, for they all realized what that meant. And in addition, looking across the fields one could see the lights of these approaching machines. They reached Thirty-first and Cleveland together. Then one turned south toward this very spot, along Cleveland Avenue. And the other continued east on Thirty-first, reconnoitering for the accident.

"Beat it, for God's sake, all of youse," whispered Hegglund,

excitedly. "Scatter!" And forthwith, seizing Maida Axelrod by the hand, he started to run east along Thirty-fifth Street, in which the car then lay—toward the outlying eastern suburbs. But after a moment, deciding that that would not do either, that it would be too easy to pursue him along a street, he cut northeast, directly across the open fields and away from the city.

And now, Clyde, as suddenly sensing what capture would mean—how all his fine thoughts of pleasure would most certainly end in disgrace and probably prison, began running also. Only in his case, instead of following Hegglund or any of the others, he turned south along Cleveland Avenue toward the southern limits of the city. But like Hegglund, realizing that that meant an easy avenue of pursuit for any one who chose to follow, he too took to the open fields. Only instead of running away from the city as before, he now turned southwest and ran toward those streets which lay to the south of Fortieth. Only much open space being before him before he should reach them, and a clump of bushes showing in the near distance, and the light of the motorcycle already sweeping the road behind him, he ran to that and for the moment dropped behind it.

Only Sparser and Laura Sipe were left within the car, she at that moment beginning to recover consciousness. And the visiting stranger, much astounded, was left standing outside.

"Why, the very idea!" he suddenly said to himself. "They must have stolen that car. It couldn't have belonged to them at all."

And just then the first motorcycle reaching the scene, Clyde from his not too distant hiding place was able to overhear. "Well, you didn't get away with it after all, did you? You thought you were pretty slick, but you didn't make it. You're the one we want, and what's become of the rest of the gang, eh? Where are they, eh?"

And hearing the suburbanite declare quite definitely that he had nothing to do with it, that the real occupants of the car had but then run away and might yet be caught if the police wished, Clyde, who was still within earshot of what was being said, began crawling upon his hands and knees at first in the snow south, south and west, always toward some of those distant streets which, lamplit and faintly glowing, he saw to the southwest of him, and among which presently, if he were not captured, he hoped to hide—to lose himself and so escape—if the fates were only kind—the misery and the punishment and the unending dissatisfaction and disappointment which now, most definitely, it all represented to him.

BOOK TWO

BOOK TWO

CHAPTER I

THE home of Samuel Griffiths in Lycurgus, New York, a city of some twenty-five thousand inhabitants midway between Utica and Albany. Near the dinner hour and by degrees the family assembling for its customary meal. On this occasion the preparations were of a more elaborate nature than usual, owing to the fact that for the past four days Mr. Samuel Griffiths, the husband and father, had been absent attending a conference of shirt and collar manufacturers in Chicago, price-cutting by upstart rivals in the west having necessitated compromise and adjustment by those who manufactured in the east. He was but now returned and had telephoned earlier in the afternoon that he had arrived, and was going to his office in the factory where he would remain until dinner time.

Being long accustomed to the ways of a practical and convinced man who believed in himself and considered his judgment and his decision sound—almost final—for the most part, anyhow, Mrs. Griffiths thought nothing of this. He would appear and greet her in due order.

Knowing that he preferred leg of lamb above many other things, after due word with Mrs. Truesdale, her homely but useful housekeeper, she ordered lamb. And the appropriate vegetables and dessert having been decided upon, she gave herself over to thoughts of her eldest daughter Myra, who, having graduated from Smith College several years before, was still unmarried. And the reason for this, as Mrs. Griffiths well understood, though she was never quite willing to admit it openly, was that Myra was not very good looking. Her nose was too long, her eyes too close-set, her chin not sufficiently rounded to give her a girlish and pleasing appearance. For the most part she seemed too thoughtful and studious—as a rule not interested in the ordinary social life of that city. Neither did she possess that savoir faire, let alone that peculiar appeal for men, that characterized some girls even when they were not pretty. As her mother saw it, she was really too critical and too intellectual, having a mind that was rather above the world in which she found herself.

Brought up amid comparative luxury, without having to worry about any of the rough details of making a living, she had been confronted, nevertheless, by the difficulties of making her own way in the matter of social favor and love—two objectives which, without beauty or charm, were about as difficult as the attaining to extreme wealth by a beggar. And the fact that for twelve years now—ever since she had been fourteen—she had seen the lives of other youths and maidens in this small world in which she moved passing gayly enough, while hers was more or less confined to reading, music, the business of keeping as neatly and attractively arrayed as possible, and of going to visit friends in the hope of possibly encountering somewhere, somehow, the one temperament who would be interested in her, had saddened, if not exactly soured her. And that despite the fact that the material comfort of her parents and herself was exceptional.

Just now she had gone through her mother's room to her own, looking as though she were not very much interested in anything. Her mother had been trying to think of something to suggest that would take her out of herself, when the younger daughter, Bella, fresh from a passing visit to the home of the Finchleys, wealthy neighbors where she had stopped on her way from the Snedeker School, burst in upon her.

Contrasted with her sister, who was tall and dark and rather sallow, Bella, though shorter, was far more gracefully and vigorously formed. She had thick brown—almost black—hair, a brown and olive complexion tinted with red, and eyes brown and genial, that blazed with an eager, seeking light. In addition to her sound and lithe physique, she possessed vitality and animation. Her arms and legs were graceful and active. Plainly she was given to liking things as she found them—enjoying life as it was—and hence, unlike her sister, she was unusually attractive to men and boys—to men and women, old and young—a fact which her mother and father well knew. No danger of any lack of marriage offers for her when the time came. As her mother saw it, too many youths and men were already buzzing around, and so posing the question of a proper husband for her. Already she had displayed a tendency to become thick and fast friends, not only with the scions of the older and more conservative families who constituted the ultra-respectable element of the city, but also, and this was more to her mother's distaste, with the sons and daughters of some of those later and hence socially less important families of the region—the sons and daughters of manufacturers of bacon, canning jars, vacuum cleaners, wooden and wicker ware, and typewriters, who consti-

tuted a solid enough financial element in the city, but who made up what might be considered the "fast set" in the local life.

In Mrs. Griffith's opinion, there was too much dancing, cabareting, automobiling to one city and another, without due social supervision. Yet, as a contrast to her sister, Myra, what a relief. It was only from the point of view of proper surveillance, or until she was safely and religiously married, that Mrs. Griffiths troubled or even objected to most of her present contacts and yearnings and gayeties. She desired to protect her.

"Now, where have you been?" she demanded, as her daughter burst into the room, throwing down her books and drawing near to the open fire that burned there.

"Just think, Mamma," began Bella most unconcernedly and almost irrelevantly. "The Finchleys are going to give up their place out at Greenwood Lake this coming summer and go up to Twelfth Lake near Pine Point. They're going to build a new bungalow up there. And Sondra says that this time it's going to be right down at the water's edge—not away from it, as it is out here. And they're going to have a great big verandah with a hardwood floor. And a boathouse big enough for a thirty-foot electric launch that Mr. Finchley is going to buy for Stuart. Won't that be wonderful? And she says that if you will let me, that I can come up there for all summer long, or for as long as I like. And Gil, too, if he will. It's just across the lake from the Emery Lodge, you know, and the East Gate Hotel. And the Phants' place, you know, the Phants of Utica, is just below theirs near Sharon. Isn't that just wonderful? Won't that be great? I wish you and Dad would make up your minds to build up there now sometime, Mamma. It looks to me now as though nearly everybody that's worth anything down here is moving up there."

She talked so fast and swung about so, looking now at the open fire burning in the grate, then out of the two high windows that commanded the front lawn and a full view of Wykeagy Avenue, lit by the electric lights in the winter dusk, that her mother had no opportunity to insert any comment until this was over. However, she managed to observe: "Yes? Well, what about the Anthonys and the Nicholsons and the Taylors? I haven't heard of their leaving Greenwood yet."

"Oh, I know, not the Anthonys or the Nicholsons or the Taylors. Who expects them to move? They're too old fashioned. They're not the kind that would move anywhere, are they? No one thinks they are. Just the same Greenwood isn't like Twelfth Lake. You know that yourself. And all the people that are any-

body down on the South Shore are going up there for sure. The Cranstons next year, Sondra says. And after that, I bet the Harriets will go, too."

"The Cranstons and the Harriets and the Finchleys and Sondra," commented her mother, half amused and half irritated. "The Cranstons and you and Bertine and Sondra—that's all I hear these days." For the Cranstons, and the Finchleys, despite a certain amount of local success in connection with this newer and faster set, were, much more than any of the others, the subject of considerable unfavorable comment. They were the people who, having moved the Cranston Wickwire Company from Albany, and the Finchley Electric Sweeper from Buffalo, and built large factories on the south bank of the Mohawk River, to say nothing of new and grandiose houses in Wykeagy Avenue and summer cottages at Greenwood, some twenty miles northwest, were setting a rather showy, and hence disagreeable, pace to all of the wealthy residents of this region. They were given to wearing the smartest clothes, to the latest novelties in cars and entertainments, and constituted a problem to those who with less means considered their position and their equipment about as fixed and interesting and attractive as such things might well be. The Cranstons and the Finchleys were in the main a thorn in the flesh of the remainder of the élite of Lycurgus—too showy and too aggressive.

"How often have I told you that I don't want you to have so much to do with Bertine or that Letta Harriet or her brother either? They're too forward. They run around and talk and show off too much. And your father feels the same as I do in regard to them. As for Sondra Finchley, if she expects to go with Bertine and you, too, then you're not going to go with her either much longer. Besides I'm not sure that your father approves of your going anywhere without some one to accompany you. You're not old enough yet. And as for your going to Twelfth Lake to the Finchleys, well, unless we all go together, there'll be no going there, either." And now Mrs. Griffiths, who leaned more to the manner and tactics of the older, if not less affluent families, stared complainingly at her daughter.

Nevertheless Bella was no more abashed than she was irritated by this. On the contrary she knew her mother and knew that she was fond of her; also that she was intrigued by her physical charm as well as her assured local social success as much as was her father, who considered her perfection itself and could be swayed by her least, as well as her much practised, smile.

"Not old enough, not old enough," commented Bella reproachfully. "Will you listen? I'll be eighteen in July. I'd like to know when you and Papa are going to think I'm old enough to go anywhere without you both. Wherever you two go, I have to go, and wherever I want to go, you two have to go, too."

"Bella," censured her mother. Then after a moment's silence, in which her daughter stood there impatiently, she added, "Of course, what else would you have us do? When you are twenty-one or two, if you are not married by then, it will be time enough to think of going off by yourself. But at your age, you shouldn't be thinking of any such thing." Bella cocked her pretty head, for at the moment the side door down stairs was thrown open, and Gilbert Griffiths, the only son of this family and who very much in face and build, if not in manner or lack of force, resembled Clyde, his western cousin, entered and ascended.

He was at this time a vigorous, self-centered and vain youth of twenty-three who, in contrast with his two sisters, seemed much sterner and far more practical. Also, probably much more intelligent and aggressive in a business way—a field in which neither of the two girls took the slightest interest. He was brisk in manner and impatient. He considered that his social position was perfectly secure, and was utterly scornful of anything but commercial success. Yet despite this he was really deeply interested in the movements of the local society, of which he considered himself and his family the most important part. Always conscious of the dignity and social standing of his family in this community, he regulated his action and speech accordingly. Ordinarily he struck the passing observer as rather sharp and arrogant, neither as youthful or as playful as his years might have warranted. Still he was young, attractive and interesting. He had a sharp, if not brilliant, tongue in his head—a gift at times for making crisp and cynical remarks. On account of his family and position he was considered also the most desirable of all the young eligible bachelors in Lycurgus. Nevertheless he was so much interested in himself that he scarcely found room in his cosmos for a keen and really intelligent understanding of anyone else.

Hearing him ascend from below and enter his room, which was at the rear of the house next to hers, Bella at once left her mother's room, and coming to the door, called: "Oh, Gil, can I come in?"

"Sure." He was whistling briskly and already, in view of

some entertainment somewhere, preparing to change to evening clothes."

"Where are you going?"

"Nowhere, for dinner. To the Wynants afterwards."

"Oh, Constance to be sure."

"No, not Constance, to be sure. Where do you get that stuff?"

"As though I didn't know."

"Lay off. Is that what you came in here for?"

"No, that isn't what I came in here for. What do you think? The Finchleys are going to build a place up at Twelfth Lake next summer, right on the lake, next to the Phants, and Mr. Finchley's going to buy Stuart a thirty-foot launch and build a boathouse with a sun-parlor right over the water to hold it. Won't that be swell, huh?"

"Don't say 'swell.' And don't say 'huh.' Can't you learn to cut out the slang? You talk like a factory girl. Is that all they teach you over at that school?"

"Listen to who's talking about cutting out slang. How about yourself? You set a fine example around here, I notice."

"Well, I'm five years older than you are. Besides I'm a man. You don't notice Myra using any of that stuff."

"Oh, Myra. But don't let's talk about that. Only think of that new house they're going to build and the fine time they're going to have up there next summer. Don't you wish we could move up there, too? We could if we wanted to—if only Papa and Mamma would agree to it."

"Oh, I don't know that it would be so wonderful," replied her brother, who was really very much interested just the same. "There are other places besides Twelfth Lake."

"Who said there weren't? But not for the people that we know around here. Where else do the best people from Albany and Utica go but there now, I'd like to know. It's going to become a regular center, Sondra says, with all the finest houses along the west shore. Just the same, the Cranstons, the Lamberts and the Harriets are going to move up there pretty soon, too," Bella added most definitely and defiantly. "That won't leave so many out at Greenwood Lake, nor the very best people, either, even if the Anthonys and Nicholsons do stay here."

"Who says the Cranstons are going up there?" asked Gilbert, now very much interested.

"Why, Sondra!"

"Who told her?"

"Bertine."

"Gee, they're getting gayer and gayer," commented her brother oddly and a little enviously. "Pretty soon Lycurgus'll be too small to hold 'em." He jerked at a bow tie he was attempting to center and grimaced oddly as his tight neck-band pinched him slightly.

For although Gilbert had recently entered into the collar and shirt industry with his father as general supervisor of manufacturing, and with every prospect of managing and controlling the entire business eventually, still he was jealous of young Grant Cranston, a youth of his own age, very appealing and attractive physically, who was really more daring with and more attractive to the girls of the younger set. Cranston seemed to be satisfied that it was possible to combine a certain amount of social pleasure with working for his father with which Gilbert did not agree. In fact, young Griffiths would have preferred, had it been possible, so to charge young Cranston with looseness, only thus far the latter had managed to keep himself well within the bounds of sobriety. And the Cranston Wickwire Company was plainly forging ahead as one of the leading industries of Lycurgus.

"Well," he added, after a moment, "they're spreading out faster than I would if I had their business. They're not the richest people in the world, either." Just the same he was thinking that, unlike himself and his parents, the Cranstons were really more daring if not socially more avid of life. He envied them.

"And what's more," added Bella interestedly, "the Finchleys are to have a dance floor over the boathouse. And Sondra says that Stuart was hoping that you would come up there and spend a lot of time this summer."

"Oh, did he?" replied Gilbert, a little enviously and sarcastically. "You mean he said he was hoping you would come up and spend a lot of time. I'll be working this summer."

"He didn't say anything of the kind, smarty. Besides it wouldn't hurt us any if we did go up there. There's nothing much out at Greenwood any more that I can see. A lot of old hen parties."

"Is that so? Mother would like to hear that."

"And you'll tell her, of course."

"Oh, no, I won't either. But I don't think we're going to follow the Finchleys or the Cranstons up to Twelfth Lake just yet, either. You can go up there if you want, if Dad'll let you."

Just then the lower door clicked again, and Bella, forgetting her quarrel with her brother, ran down to greet her father.

CHAPTER II

THE head of the Lycurgus branch of the Griffiths, as contrasted with the father of the Kansas City family, was most arresting. Unlike his shorter and more confused brother of the Door of Hope, whom he had not even seen for thirty years, he was a little above the average in height, very well-knit, although comparatively slender, shrewd of eye, and incisive both as to manner and speech. Long used to contending for himself, and having come by effort as well as results to know that he was above the average in acumen and commercial ability, he was inclined at times to be a bit intolerant of those who were not. He was not ungenerous or unpleasant in manner, but always striving to maintain a calm and judicial air. And he told himself by way of excuse for his mannerisms that he was merely accepting himself at the value that others placed upon him and all those who, like himself, were successful.

Having arrived in Lycurgus about twenty-five years before with some capital and a determination to invest in a new collar enterprise which had been proposed to him, he had succeeded thereafter beyond his wildest expectations. And naturally he was vain about it. His family at this time—twenty-five years later—unquestionably occupied one of the best, as well as the most tastefully constructed residences in Lycurgus. They were also esteemed as among the few best families of this region—being, if not the oldest, at least among the most conservative, respectable and successful in Lycurgus. His two younger children, if not the eldest, were much to the front socially in the younger and gayer set and so far nothing had happened to weaken or darken his prestige.

On returning from Chicago on this particular day, after having concluded several agreements there which spelled trade harmony and prosperity for at least one year, he was inclined to feel very much at ease and on good terms with the world. Nothing had occurred to mar his trip. In his absence the Griffiths Collar and Shirt Company had gone on as though he had been present. Trade orders at the moment were large.

Now as he entered his own door he threw down a heavy

bag and fashionably made coat and turned to see what he rather expected—Bella hurrying toward him. Indeed she was his pet, the most pleasing and different and artistic thing, as he saw it, that all his years had brought to him—youth, health, gayety, intelligence and affection—all in the shape of a pretty daughter.

"Oh, Daddy," she called most sweetly and enticingly as she saw him enter. "Is that you?"

"Yes. At least it feels a little like me at the present moment. How's my baby girl?" And he opened his arms and received the bounding form of his last born. "There's a good, strong, healthy girl, I'll say," he announced as he withdrew his affectionate lips from hers. "And how's the bad girl been behaving herself since I left? No fibbing this time."

"Oh, just fine, Daddy. You can ask any one. I couldn't be better."

"And your mother?"

"She's all right, Daddy. She's up in her room. I don't think she heard you come in."

"And Myra? Is she back from Albany yet?"

"Yes. She's in her room. I heard her playing just now. I just got in myself a little while ago."

"Ay, hai. Gadding about again. I know you." He held up a genial forefinger, warningly, while Bella swung onto one of his arms and kept pace with him up the stairs to the floor above.

"Oh, no, I wasn't either, now," she cooed shrewdly and sweetly. "Just see how you pick on me, Daddy. I was only over with Sondra for a little while. And what do you think, Daddy? They're going to give up the place at Greenwood and build a big handsome bungalow up on Twelfth Lake right away. And Mr. Finchley's going to buy a big electric launch for Stuart and they're going to live up there next summer, maybe all the time, from May until October. And so are the Cranstons, maybe."

Mr. Griffiths, long used to his younger daughter's wiles, was interested at the moment not so much by the thought that she wished to convey—that Twelfth Lake was more desirable socially than Greenwood—as he was by the fact that the Finchleys were able to make this sudden and rather heavy expenditure for social reasons only.

Instead of answering Bella he went on upstairs and into his wife's room. He kissed Mrs. Griffiths, looked in upon Myra, who came to the door to embrace him, and spoke of the success-

ful nature of the trip. One could see by the way he embraced his wife that there was an agreeable understanding between them—no disharmony—by the way he greeted Myra that if he did not exactly sympathize with her temperament and point of view, at least he included her within the largess of his affection.

As they were talking Mrs. Truesdale announced that dinner was ready, and Gilbert, having completed his toilet, now entered.

"I say, Dad," he called, "I have an interesting thing I want to see you about in the morning. Can I?"

"All right, I'll be there. Come in about noon."

"Come on all, or the dinner will be getting cold," admonished Mrs. Griffiths earnestly, and forthwith Gilbert turned and went down, followed by Griffiths, who still had Bella on his arm. And after him came Mrs. Griffiths and Myra, who now emerged from her room and joined them.

Once seated at the table, the family forthwith began discussing topics of current local interest. For Bella, who was the family's chief source of gossip, gathering the most of it from the Snedeker School, through which all the social news appeared to percolate most swiftly, suddenly announced: "What do you think, Mamma? Rosetta Nicholson, that niece of Mrs. Disston Nicholson, who was over here last summer from Albany—you know, she came over the night of the Alumnæ Garden Party on our lawn—you remember—the young girl with the yellow hair and squinty blue eyes—her father owns that big wholesale grocery over there—well, she's engaged to that Herbert Tickham of Utica, who was visiting Mrs. Lambert last summer. You don't remember him, but I do. He was tall and dark and sorta awkward, and awfully pale, but very handsome—oh, a regular movie hero."

"There you go, Mrs. Griffiths," interjected Gilbert shrewdly and cynically to his mother. "A delegation from the Misses Snedeker's Select School sneaks off to the movies to brush up on heroes from time to time."

Griffiths senior suddenly observed: "I had a curious experience in Chicago this time, something I think the rest of you will be interested in." He was thinking of an accidental encounter two days before in Chicago between himself and the eldest son, as it proved to be, of his younger brother Asa. Also of a conclusion he had come to in regard to him.

"Oh, what is it, Daddy?" pleaded Bella at once. "Do tell me about it."

"Spin the big news, Dad," added Gilbert, who, because of the favor of his father, felt very free and close to him always.

"Well, while I was in Chicago at the Union League Club, I met a young man who is related to us, a cousin of you three children, by the way, the eldest son of my brother Asa, who is out in Denver now, I understand. I haven't seen or heard from him in thirty years." He paused and mused dubiously.

"Not the one who is a preacher somewhere, Daddy?" inquired Bella, looking up.

"Yes, the preacher. At least I understand he was for a while after he left home. But his son tells me he has given that up now. He's connected with something in Denver—a hotel, I think."

"But what's his son like?" interrogated Bella, who only knew such well groomed and ostensibly conservative youths and men as her present social status and supervision permitted, and in consequence was intensely interested. The son of a western hotel proprietor!

"A cousin? How old is he?" asked Gilbert instantly, curious as to his character and situation and ability.

"Well, he's a very interesting young man, I think," continued Griffiths tentatively and somewhat dubiously, since up to this hour he had not truly made up his mind about Clyde. "He's quite good-looking and well-mannered, too—about your own age, I should say, Gil, and looks a lot like you—very much so —same eyes and mouth and chin." He looked at his son examiningly. "He's a little bit taller, if anything, and looks a little thinner, though I don't believe he really is."

At the thought of a cousin who looked like him—possibly as attractive in every way as himself—and bearing his own name, Gilbert chilled and bristled slightly. For here in Lycurgus, up to this time, he was well and favorably known as the only son and heir presumptive to the managerial control of his father's business, and to at least a third of the estate, if not more. And now, if by any chance it should come to light that there was a relative, a cousin of his own years and one who looked and acted like him, even—he bridled at the thought. Forthwith (a psychic reaction which he did not understand and could not very well control) he decided that he did not like him—could not like him.

"What's he doing now?" he asked in a curt and rather sour tone, though he attempted to avoid the latter element in his voice.

"Well, he hasn't much of a job, I must say," smiled Samuel

Griffiths, meditatively. "He's only a bell-hop in the Union League Club in Chicago, at present, but a very pleasant and gentlemanly sort of a boy, I will say. I was quite taken with him. In fact, because he told me there wasn't much opportunity for advancement where he was, and that he would like to get into something where there was more chance to do something and be somebody, I told him that if he wanted to come on here and try his luck with us, we might do a little something for him—give him a chance to show what he could do, at least."

He had not intended to set forth at once the fact that he became interested in his nephew to this extent, but—rather to wait and thrash it out at different times with both his wife and son, but the occasion having seemed to offer itself, he had spoken. And now that he had, he felt rather glad of it, for because Clyde so much resembled Gilbert he did want to do a little something for him.

But Gilbert bristled and chilled, the while Bella and Myra, if not Mrs. Griffiths, who favored her only son in everything—even to preferring him to be without a blood relation or other rival of any kind, rather warmed to the idea. A cousin who was a Griffiths and good-looking and about Gilbert's age—and who, as their father reported, was rather pleasant and well mannered—that pleased Bella and Myra while Mrs. Griffiths, noting Gilbert's face darken, was not so moved. He would not like him. But out of respect for her husband's authority and general ability in all things, she now remained silent. But not so, Bella.

"Oh, you're going to give him a place, are you, Dad?" she commented. "That's interesting. I hope he's better-looking than the rest of our cousins."

"Bella," chided Mrs. Griffiths, while Myra, recalling a gauche uncle and cousin who had come on from Vermont several years before to visit them a few days, smiled wisely. At the same time Gilbert, deeply irritated, was mentally fighting against the idea. He could not see it at all. "Of course we're not turning away applicants who want to come in and learn the business right along now, as it is," he said sharply.

"Oh, I know," replied his father, "but not cousins and nephews exactly. Besides he looks very intelligent and ambitious to me. It wouldn't do any great harm if we let at least one of our relatives come here and show what he can do. I can't see why we shouldn't employ him as well as another."

"I don't believe Gil likes the idea of any other fellow in

Lycurgus having the same name and looking like him," suggested Bella, slyly, and with a certain touch of malice due to the fact that her brother was always criticizing her.

"Oh, what rot!" Gilbert snapped irritably. "Why don't you make a sensible remark once in a while? What do I care whether he has the same name or not—or looks like me, either?" His expression at the moment was particularly sour.

"Gilbert!" pleaded his mother, reprovingly, "How can you talk so? And to your sister, too?"

"Well, I don't want to do anything in connection with this young man if it's going to cause any hard feelings here," went on Griffiths senior. "All I know is that his father was never very practical and I doubt if Clyde has ever had a real chance." (His son winced at this friendly and familiar use of his cousin's first name.) "My only idea in bringing him on here was to give him a start. I haven't the faintest idea whether he would make good or not. He might and again he might not. If he didn't—" He threw up one hand as much as to say, "If he doesn't, we will have to toss him aside, of course."

"Well, I think that's very kind of you, father," observed Mrs. Griffiths, pleasantly and diplomatically. "I hope he proves satisfactory."

"And there's another thing," added Griffiths wisely and sententiously. "I don't expect this young man, so long as he is in my employ and just because he's a nephew of mine, to be treated differently to any other employee in the factory. He's coming here to work—not play. And while he is here, trying, I don't expect any of you to pay him any social attention—not the slightest. He's not the sort of boy anyhow, that would want to put himself on us—at least he didn't impress me that way, and he wouldn't be coming down here with any notion that he was to be placed on an equal footing with any of us. That would be silly. Later on, if he proves that he is really worth while, able to take care of himself, knows his place and keeps it, and any of you wanted to show him any little attention, well, then it will be time enough to see, but not before then."

By then, the maid, Amanda, assistant to Mrs. Truesdale, was taking away the dinner plates and preparing to serve the dessert. But as Mr. Griffiths rarely ate dessert, and usually chose this period, unless company was present, to look after certain stock and banking matters which he kept in a small desk in the library, he now pushed back his chair, arose, excusing himself to his family, and walked into the library adjoining. The others remained.

"I would like to see what he's like, wouldn't you?" Myra asked her mother.

"Yes. And I do hope he measures up to all of your father's expectations. He will not feel right if he doesn't."

"I can't get this," observed Gilbert, "bringing people on now when we can hardly take care of those we have. And besides, imagine what the bunch around here will say if they find out that our cousin was only a bell-hop before coming here!"

"Oh, well, they won't have to know that, will they?" said Myra.

"Oh, won't they? Well, what's to prevent him from speaking about it—unless we tell him not to—or some one coming along who has seen him there." His eyes snapped viciously. "At any rate, I hope he doesn't. It certainly wouldn't do us any good around here."

And Bella added, "I hope he's not as dull as Uncle Allen's two boys. They're the most uninteresting boys I ever did see."

"Bella," cautioned her mother once more.

CHAPTER III

THE Clyde whom Samuel Griffiths described as having met at the Union League Club in Chicago, was a somewhat modified version of the one who had fled from Kansas City three years before. He was now twenty, a little taller and more firmly but scarcely any more robustly built, and considerably more experienced, of course. For since leaving his home and work in Kansas City and coming in contact with some rough usage in the world—humble tasks, wretched rooms, no intimates to speak of, plus the compulsion to make his own way as best he might—he had developed a kind of self-reliance and smoothness of address such as one would scarcely have credited him with three years before. There was about him now, although he was not nearly so smartly dressed as when he left Kansas City, a kind of conscious gentility of manner which pleased, even though it did not at first arrest attention. Also, and this was considerably different from the Clyde who had crept away from Kansas City in a box car, he had much more of an air of caution and reserve.

For ever since he had fled from Kansas City, and by one humble device and another forced to make his way, he had been coming to the conclusion that on himself alone depended his future. His family, as he now definitely sensed, could do nothing for him. They were too impractical and too poor—his mother, father, Esta, all of them.

At the same time, in spite of all their difficulties, he could not now help but feel drawn to them, his mother in particular, and the old home life that had surrounded him as a boy—his brother and sisters, Esta included, since she, too, as he now saw it, had been brought no lower than he by circumstances over which she probably had no more control. And often, his thoughts and mood had gone back with a definite and disconcerting pang because of the way in which he had treated his mother as well as the way in which his career in Kansas City had been suddenly interrupted—his loss of Hortense Briggs—a severe blow; the troubles that had come to him since; the trouble that must have come to his mother and Esta because of him.

On reaching St. Louis two days later after his flight, and

after having been most painfully bundled out into the snow a hundred miles from Kansas City in the gray of a winter morning, and at the same time relieved of his watch and overcoat by two brakemen who had found him hiding in the car, he had picked up a Kansas City paper—*The Star*—only to realize that his worst fear in regard to all that had occurred had come true. For there, under a two-column head, and with fully a column and a half of reading matter below, was the full story of all that had happened: a little girl, the eleven-year-old daughter of a well-to-do Kansas City family, knocked down and almost instantly killed—she had died an hour later; Sparser and Miss Sipe in a hospital and under arrest at the same time, guarded by a policeman sitting in the hospital awaiting their recovery; a splendid car very seriously damaged; Sparser's father, in the absence of the owner of the car for whom he worked, at once incensed and made terribly unhappy by the folly and seeming criminality and recklessness of his son.

But what was worse, the unfortunate Sparser had already been charged with larceny and homicide, and wishing, no doubt, to minimize his own share in this grave catastrophe, had not only revealed the names of all who were with him in the car—the youths in particular and their hotel address—but had charged that they along with him were equally guilty, since they had urged him to make speed at the time and against his will—a claim, which was true enough, as Clyde knew. And Mr. Squires, on being interviewed at the hotel, had furnished the police and the newspapers with the names of their parents and their home addresses.

This last was the sharpest blow of all. For there followed disturbing pictures of how their respective parents or relatives had taken it on being informed of their sins. Mrs. Ratterer, Tom's mother, had cried and declared her boy was a good boy, and had not meant to do any harm, she was sure. And Mrs. Hegglund—Oscar's devoted but aged mother—had said that there was not a more honest or generous soul and that he must have been drinking. And at his own home—*The Star* had described his mother as standing, pale, very startled and very distressed, clasping and unclasping her hands and looking as though she were scarcely able to grasp what was meant, unwilling to believe that her son had been one of the party and assuring all that he would most certainly return soon and explain all, and that there must be some mistake.

However, he had not returned. Nor had he heard anything more after that. For, owing to his fear of the police, as well

as of his mother—her sorrowful, hopeless eyes, he had not written for months, and then a letter to his mother only to say that he was well and that she must not worry. He gave neither name nor address. Later, after that he had wandered on, essaying one small job and another, in St. Louis, Peoria, Chicago, Milwaukee—dishwashing in a restaurant, soda-clerking in a small outlying drug-store, attempting to learn to be a shoe clerk, a grocer's clerk, and what not; and being discharged and laid off and quitting because he did not like it. He had sent her ten dollars once—another time five, having, as he felt, that much to spare. After nearly a year and a half he had decided that the search must have lessened, his own part in the crime being forgotten, possibly, or by then not deemed sufficiently important to pursue—and when he was once more making a moderate living as the driver of a delivery wagon in Chicago, a job that paid him fifteen dollars a week, he resolved that he would write his mother, because now he could say that he had a decent place and had conducted himself respectably for a long time, although not under his own name.

And so at that time, living in a hall bedroom on the West Side of Chicago—Paulina Street—he had written his mother the following letter:

DEAR MOTHER:

Are you still in Kansas City? I wish you would write and tell me. I would so like to hear from you again and to write you again, too, if you really want me to. Honestly I do, Ma. I have been so lonely here. Only be careful and don't let any one know where I am yet. It won't do any good and might do a lot of harm just when I am trying so hard to get a start again. I didn't do anything wrong that time, myself. Really I didn't, although the papers said so—just went along. But I was afraid they would punish me for something that I didn't do. I just couldn't come back then. I wasn't to blame and then I was afraid of what you and father might think. But they invited me, Ma. I didn't tell him to go any faster or to take that car like he said. He took it himself and invited me and the others to go along. Maybe we were all to blame for running down that little girl, but we didn't mean to. None of us. And I have been so terribly sorry ever since. Think of all the trouble I have caused you! And just at the time when you most needed me. Gee! Mother, I hope you can forgive me. Can you?

I keep wondering how you are. And Esta and Julia and Frank and Father. I wish I knew where you are and what you are doing. You know how I feel about you, don't you, Ma? I've got a lot more sense now, anyhow, I see things different than I used to. I want to do something in this world. I want to be successful. I only have a fair place now, not as good as I had in K. C., but fair, and not in the same line. But I want something better, though I don't want to go back in the hotel business either if I can help it. It's not so very good

for a young man like me—too high-flying, I guess. You see I know a lot more than I did back there. They like me all right where I am, but I got to get on in this world. Besides I am not really making more than my expenses here now, just my room and board and clothes, but I am trying to save a little in order to get into some line where I can work up and learn something. A person has to have a line of some kind these days. I see that now.

Won't you write me and tell me how you all are and what you are doing? I'd like to know. Give my love to Frank and Julia and Father and Esta, if they are all still there. I love you just the same and I guess you care for me a little, anyhow, don't you? I won't sign my real name, because it may be dangerous yet. (I haven't been using it since I left K. C.) But I'll give you my other one, which I'm going to leave off pretty soon and take up my old one. Wish I could do it now, but I'm afraid to yet. You can address me, if you will, as

HARRY TENET,
General Delivery, Chicago.

I'll call for it in a few days. I sign this way so as not to cause you or me any more trouble, see? But as soon as I feel more sure that this other thing has blown over, I'll use my own name again, sure.

Lovingly,

YOUR SON.

He drew a line where his real name should be and underneath wrote "you know" and mailed the letter.

Following that, because his mother had been anxious about him all this time and wondering where he was, he soon received a letter, postmarked Denver, which surprised him very much, for he had expected to hear from her as still in Kansas City.

DEAR SON:

I was surprised and so glad to get my boy's letter and to know that you were alive and safe. I had hoped and prayed so that you would return to the straight and narrow path—the only path that will ever lead you to success and happiness of any kind, and that God would let me hear from you as safe and well and working somewhere and doing well. And now he has rewarded my prayers. I knew he would. Blessed be His holy name.

Not that I blame you altogether for all that terrible trouble you got into and bringing so much suffering and disgrace on yourself and us—for well I know how the devil tempts and pursues all of us mortals and particularly just such a child as you. Oh, my son, if you only knew how you must be on your guard to avoid these pitfalls. And you have such a long road ahead of you. Will you be ever watchful and try always to cling to the teachings of our Savior that your mother has always tried to impress upon the minds and hearts of all you dear children? Will you stop and listen to the voice of our Lord that is ever with us, guiding our footsteps safely up the rocky path that leads to a heaven more beautiful than we can ever imagine here? Promise me, my child, that you will hold fast to all your early teachings and always bear in mind that "right is might," and

my boy, never, never, take a drink of any kind no matter who offers it to you. There is where the devil reigns in all his glory and is ever ready to triumph over the weak one. Remember always what I have told you so often "Strong drink is raging and wine is a mocker," and it is my earnest prayer that these words will ring in your ears every time you are tempted—for I am sure now that that was perhaps the real cause of that terrible accident.

I suffered terribly over that, Clyde, and just at the time when I had such a dreadful ordeal to face with Esta. I almost lost her. She had such an awful time. The poor child paid dearly for her sin. We had to go in debt so deep and it took so long to work it out—but finally we did and now things are not as bad as they were, quite.

As you see, we are now in Denver. We have a mission of our own here now with housing quarters for all of us. Besides we have a few rooms to rent which Esta, and you know she is now Mrs. Nixon, of course, takes care of. She has a fine little boy who reminds your father and me of you so much when you were a baby. He does little things that are you all over again so many times that we almost feel that you are with us again—as you were. It is comforting, too, sometimes.

Frank and Julie have grown so and are quite a help to me. Frank has a paper route and earns a little money which helps. Esta wants to keep them in school just as long as we can.

Your father is not very well, but of course, he is getting older, and he does the best he can.

I am awful glad, Clyde, that you are trying so hard to better yourself in every way and last night your father was saying again that your uncle, Samuel Griffiths, of Lycurgus, is so rich and successful and I thought that maybe if you wrote him and asked him to give you something there so that you could learn the business, perhaps he would. I don't see why he wouldn't. After all you are his nephew. You know he has a great collar business there in Lycurgus and he is very rich, so they say. Why don't you write him and see? Somehow I feel that perhaps he would find a place for you and then you would have something sure to work for. Let me know if you do and what he says.

I want to hear from you often, Clyde. Please write and let us know all about you and how you are getting along. Won't you? Of course we love you as much as ever, and will do our best always to try to guide you right. We want you to succeed more than you know, but we also want you to be a good boy, and live a clean, righteous life, for, my son, what matter it if a man gaineth the whole world and loseth his own soul?

Write your mother, Clyde, and bear in mind that her love is always with you—guiding you—pleading with you to do right in the name of the Lord.

Affectionately,

MOTHER.

And so it was that Clyde had begun to think of his uncle Samuel and his great business long before he encountered him. He had also experienced an enormous relief in learning that his parents were no longer in the same financial difficulties they were

when he left, and safely housed in a hotel, or at least a lodging house, probably connected with this new mission.

Then two months after he had received his mother's first letter and while he was deciding almost every day that he must do something, and that forthwith, he chanced one day to deliver to the Union League Club on Jackson Boulevard a package of ties and handkerchiefs which some visitor to Chicago had purchased at the store, for which he worked. Upon entering, who should he come in contact with but Ratterer in the uniform of a club employee. He was in charge of inquiry and packages at the door. Although neither he nor Ratterer quite grasped immediately the fact that they were confronting one another again, after a moment Ratterer had exclaimed: "Clyde!" And then, seizing him by an arm, he added enthusiastically and yet cautiously in a very low tone: "Well, of all things! The devil! Whaddya know? Put 'er there. Where do you come from anyhow?" And Clyde, equally excited, exclaimed, "Well, by jing, if it ain't Tom. Whaddya know? You working here?"

Ratterer, who (like Clyde) had for the moment quite forgotten the troublesome secret which lay between them, added: "That's right. Surest thing you know. Been here for nearly a year, now." Then with a sudden pull at Clyde's arm, as much as to say, "Silence!" he drew Clyde to one side, out of the hearing of the youth to whom he had been talking as Clyde came in, and added: "Ssh! I'm working here under my own name, but I'd rather not let 'em know I'm from K. C., see. I'm supposed to be from Cleveland."

And with that he once more pressed Clyde's arm genially and looked him over. And Clyde, equally moved, added: "Sure. That's all right. I'm glad you were able to connect. My name's Tenet, Harry Tenet. Don't forget that." And both were radiantly happy because of old times' sake.

But Ratterer, noticing Clyde's delivery uniform, observed: "Driving a delivery, eh? Gee, that's funny. You driving a delivery. Imagine. That kills me. What do you want to do that for?" Then seeing from Clyde's expression that his reference to his present position might not be the most pleasing thing in the world, since Clyde at once observed: "Well, I've been up against it, sorta," he added: "But say, I want to see you. Where are you living?" (Clyde told him.) "That's all right. I get off here at six. Why not drop around after you're through work. Or, I'll tell you—suppose we meet at—well, how about Henrici's on Randolph Street? Is that all right? At seven, say. I get off at six and I can be over there by then if you can."

Clyde, who was happy to the point of ecstasy in meeting Ratterer again, nodded a cheerful assent.

He boarded his wagon and continued his deliveries, yet for the rest of the afternoon his mind was on this approaching meeting with Ratterer. And at five-thirty he hurried to his barn and then to his boarding house on the west side, where he donned his street clothes, then hastened to Henrici's. He had not been standing on the corner a minute before Ratterer appeared, very genial and friendly and dressed, if anything, more neatly than ever.

"Gee, it's good to have a look at you, old socks!" he began. "Do you know you're the only one of that bunch that I've seen since I left K. C.? That's right. My sister wrote me after we left home that no one seemed to know what became of either Higby or Heggie, or you, either. They sent that fellow Sparser up for a year—did you hear that? Tough, eh? But not so much for killing the little girl, but for taking the car and running it without a license and not stopping when signaled. That's what they got him for. But say,"—he lowered his voice most significantly at this point, "We'da got that if they'd got us. Oh, gee, I was scared. And run?" And once more he began to laugh, but rather hysterically at that. "What a wallop, eh? An' us leavin' him and that girl in the car. Oh, say. Tough, what? Just what else could a fellow do, though? No need of all of us going up, eh? What was her name? Laura Sipe. An' you cut out before I saw you, even. And that little Briggs girl of yours did, too. Did you go home with her?"

Clyde shook his head negatively.

"I should say I didn't," he exclaimed.

"Well, where did you go then?" he asked.

Clyde told him. And after he had set forth a full picture of his own wayfarings, Ratterer returned with: "Gee, you didn't know that that little Briggs girl left with a guy from out there for New York right after that, did you? Some fellow who worked in a cigar store, so Louise told me. She saw her afterwards just before she left with a new fur coat and all." (Clyde winced sadly.) "Gee, but you were a sucker to fool around with her. She didn't care for you or nobody. But you was pretty much gone on her, I guess, eh?" And he grinned at Clyde amusedly, and chucked him under the arm, in his old teasing way.

But in regard to himself, he proceeded to unfold a tale of only modest adventure, which was very different from the one Clyde had narrated, a tale which had less of nerves and worry and

more of a sturdy courage and faith in his own luck and possibilities. And finally he had "caught on" to this, because, as he phrased it, "you can always get something in Chi."

And here he had been ever since—"very quiet, of course," but no one had ever said a word to him.

And forthwith, he began to explain that just at present there wasn't anything in the Union League, but that he would talk to Mr. Haley who was superintendent of the club—and that if Clyde wanted to, and Mr. Haley knew of anything, he would try and find out if there was an opening anywhere, or likely to be, and if so, Clyde could slip into it.

"But can that worry stuff," he said to Clyde toward the end of the evening. "It don't get you nothing."

And then only two days after this most encouraging conversation, and while Clyde was still debating whether he would resign his job, resume his true name and canvass the various hotels in search of work, a note came to his room, brought by one of the bell-boys of the Union League which read: "See Mr. Lightall at the Great Northern before noon to-morrow. There's a vacancy over there. It ain't the very best, but it'll get you something better later."

And accordingly Clyde, after telephoning his department manager that he was ill and would not be able to work that day, made his way to this hotel in his very best clothes. And on the strength of what references he could give, was allowed to go to work; and much to his relief under his own name. Also, to his gratification, his salary was fixed at twenty dollars a month, meals included. But the tips, as he now learned, aggregated not more than ten a week—yet that, counting meals was far more than he was now getting as he comforted himself; and so much easier work, even if it did take him back into the old line, where he still feared to be seen and arrested.

It was not so very long after this—not more than three months—before a vacancy occurred in the Union League staff. Ratterer, having some time before established himself as day assistant to the club staff captain, and being on good terms with him, was able to say to the latter that he knew exactly the man for the place—Clyde Griffiths—then employed at the Great Northern. And accordingly, Clyde was sent for, and being carefully coached beforehand by Ratterer as to how to approach his new superior, and what to say, he was given the place.

And here, very different from the Great Northern and superior from a social and material point of view, as Clyde saw it, to even the Green-Davidson, he was able once more to view at close

range a type of life that most affected, unfortunately, his bump of position and distinction. For to this club from day to day came or went such a company of seemingly mentally and socially worldly elect as he had never seen anywhere before, the self-integrated and self-centered from not only all of the states of his native land but from all countries and continents. American politicians from the north, south, east, west—the principal politicians and bosses, or alleged statesmen of their particular regions —surgeons, scientists, arrived physicians, generals, literary and social figures, not only from America but from the world over.

Here also, a fact which impressed and even startled his sense of curiosity and awe, even—there was no faintest trace of that sex element which had characterized most of the phases of life to be seen in the Green-Davidson, and more recently the Great Northern. In fact, in so far as he could remember, had seemed to run through and motivate nearly, if not quite all of the phases of life that he had thus far contacted. But here was no sex—no trace of it. No women were admitted to this club. These various distinguished individuals came and went, singly as a rule, and with the noiseless vigor and reserve that characterizes the ultra successful. They often ate alone, conferred in pairs and groups, noiselessly—read their papers or books, or went here and there in swiftly driven automobiles—but for the most part seemed to be unaware of, or at least unaffected by, that element of passion which, to his immature mind up to this time, had seemed to propel and disarrange so many things in those lesser worlds with which up to now he had been identified.

Probably one could not attain to or retain one's place in so remarkable a world as this unless one were indifferent to sex, a disgraceful passion, of course. And hence in the presence or under the eyes of such people one had to act and seem as though such thoughts as from time to time swayed one were far from one's mind.

After he had worked here a little while, under the influence of this organization and various personalities who came here, he had taken on a most gentlemanly and reserved air. When he was within the precincts of the club itself, he felt himself different from what he really was—more subdued, less romantic, more practical, certain that if he tried now, imitated the soberer people of the world, and those only, that some day he might succeed, if not greatly, at least much better than he had thus far. And who knows? What if he worked very steadily and made only the right sort of contacts and conducted himself with the greatest care here, one of these very remarkable men whom he

saw entering or departing from here might take a fancy to him and offer him a connection with something important somewhere, such as he had never had before, and that might lift him into a world such as he had never known.

For to say the truth, Clyde had a soul that was not destined to grow up. He lacked decidedly that mental clarity and inner directing application that in so many permits them to sort out from the facts and avenues of life the particular thing or things that make for their direct advancement.

CHAPTER IV

HOWEVER, as he now fancied, it was because he lacked an education that he had done so poorly. Because of those various moves from city to city in his early youth, he had never been permitted to collect such a sum of practical training in any field as would permit him, so he thought, to aspire to the great worlds of which these men appeared to be a part. Yet his soul now yearned for this. The people who lived in fine houses, who stopped at great hotels, and had men like Mr. Squires, and the manager of the bell-hops here, to wait on them and arrange for their comfort. And he was still a bell-hop. And close to twenty-one. At times it made him very sad. He wished and wished that he could get into some work where he could rise and be somebody—not always remain a bell-hop, as at times he feared he might.

About the time that he reached this conclusion in regard to himself and was meditating on some way to improve and safeguard his future, his uncle, Samuel Griffiths, arrived in Chicago. And having connections here which made a card to this club an obvious civility, he came directly to it and for several days was about the place conferring with individuals who came to see him, or hurrying to and fro to meet people and visit concerns whom he deemed it important to see.

And it was not an hour after he arrived before Ratterer, who had charge of the pegboard at the door by day and who had but a moment before finished posting the name of this uncle on the board, signaled to Clyde, who came over.

"Didn't you say you had an uncle or something by the name of Griffiths in the collar business somewhere in New York State?"

"Sure," replied Clyde. "Samuel Griffiths. He has a big collar factory in Lycurgus. That's his ad you see in all the papers and that's his fire sign over there on Michigan Avenue."

"Would you know him if you saw him?"

"No," replied Clyde. "I never saw him in all my life."

"I'll bet anything it's the same fellow," commented Ratterer, consulting a small registry slip that had been handed him. "Looka here—Samuel Griffiths, Lycurgus, N. Y. That's probably the same guy, eh?"

"Surest thing you know," added Clyde, very much interested and even excited, for this was the identical uncle about whom he had been thinking so long.

"He just went through here a few minutes ago," went on Ratterer. "Devoy took his bags up to K. Swell-looking man, too. You better keep your eye open and take a look at him when he comes down again. Maybe it's your uncle. He's only medium tall and kinda thin. Wears a small gray mustache and a pearl gray hat. Good-lookin'. I'll point him out to you. If it is your uncle you better shine up to him. Maybe he'll do somepin' for you—give you a collar or two," he added, laughing.

Clyde laughed too as though he very much appreciated this joke, although in reality he was flustered. His uncle Samuel! And in this club! Well, then this was his opportunity to introduce himself to his uncle. He had intended writing him before ever he secured this place, but now he was here in this club and might speak to him if he chose.

But hold! What would his uncle think of him, supposing he chose to introduce himself? For he was a bell-boy again and acting in that capacity in this club. What, for instance, might be his uncle's attitude toward boys who worked as bell-boys, particularly at his—Clyde's—years. For he was over twenty now, and getting to be pretty old for a bell-boy, that is, if one ever intended to be anything else. A man of his wealth and high position might look on bell-hopping as menial, particularly bell-boys who chanced to be related to him. He might not wish to have anything to do with him—might not even wish him to address him in any way. It was in this state that he remained for fully twenty-four hours after he knew that his uncle had arrived at this club.

The following afternoon, however, after he had seen him at least half a dozen times and had been able to formulate the most agreeable impressions of him, since his uncle appeared to be so very quick, alert, incisive—so very different from his father in every way, and so rich and respected by every one here—he began to wonder, to fear even at times, whether he was going to let this remarkable opportunity slip. For after all, his uncle did not look to him to be at all unkindly—quite the reverse—very pleasant. And when, at the suggestion of Ratterer, he had gone to his uncle's room to secure a letter which was to be sent by special messenger, his uncle had scarcely looked at him, but instead had handed him the letter and half a dollar. "See that a boy takes that right away and keep the money for yourself," he had remarked.

Clyde's excitement was so great at the moment that he wondered that his uncle did not guess that he was his nephew. But plainly he did not. And he went away a little crestfallen.

Later some half dozen letters for his uncle having been put in the key-box, Ratterer called Clyde's attention to them. "If you want to run in on him again, here's your chance. Take those up to him. He's in his room, I think." And Clyde, after some hesitation, had finally taken the letters and gone to his uncle's suite once more.

His uncle was writing at the time and merely called: "Come!" Then Clyde, entering and smiling rather enigmatically, observed: "Here's some mail for you, Mr. Griffiths."

"Thank you very much, my son," replied his uncle and proceeded to finger his vest pocket for change. But Clyde, seizing this opportunity, exclaimed: "Oh, no, I don't want anything for that." And then before his uncle could say anything more, although he proceeded to hold out some silver to him, he added: "I believe I'm related to you, Mr. Griffiths. You're Mr. Samuel Griffiths of the Griffiths Collar Company of Lycurgus, aren't you?"

"Yes, I have a little something to do with it, I believe. Who are you?" returned his uncle, looking at him sharply.

"My name's Clyde Griffiths. My father, Asa Griffiths, is your brother, I believe."

At the mention of this particular brother, who, to the knowledge of all the members of this family, was distinctly not a success materially, the face of Samuel Griffiths clouded the least trifle. For the mention of Asa brought rather unpleasingly before him the stocky and decidedly not well-groomed figure of his younger brother, whom he had not seen in so many years. His most recent distinct picture of him was as a young man of about Clyde's age about his father's house near Bertwick, Vermont. But how different! Clyde's father was then short, fat and poorly knit mentally as well as physically—oleaginous and a bit mushy, as it were. His chin was not firm, his eyes a pale watery blue, and his hair frizzled. Whereas this son of his was neat, alert, good-looking and seemingly well-mannered and intelligent, as most bell-hops were inclined to be as he noted. And he liked him.

However, Samuel Griffiths, who along with his elder brother Allen had inherited the bulk of his father's moderate property, and this because of Joseph Griffiths' prejudice against his youngest son, had always felt that perhaps an injustice had been done

Asa. For Asa, not having proved very practical or intelligent, his father had first attempted to drive and then later ignore him, and finally had turned him out at about Clyde's age, and had afterward left the bulk of his property, some thirty thousand dollars, to these two elder brothers, share and share alike—willing Asa but a petty thousand.

It was this thought in connection with this younger brother that now caused him to stare at Clyde rather curiously. For Clyde, as he could see, was in no way like the younger brother who had been harried from his father's home so many years before. Rather he was more like his own son, Gilbert, whom, as he now saw he resembled. Also in spite of all of Clyde's fears he was obviously impressed by the fact that he should have any kind of place in this interesting club. For to Samuel Griffiths, who was more than less confined to the limited activities and environment of Lycurgus, the character and standing of this particular club was to be respected. And those young men who served the guests of such an institution as this, were, in the main, possessed of efficient and unobtrusive manners. Therefore to see Clyde standing before him in his neat gray and black uniform and with the air of one whose social manners at least were excellent, caused him to think favorably of him.

"You don't tell me!" he exclaimed interestedly. "So you're Asa's son. I do declare! Well, now, this is a surprise. You see I haven't seen or heard from your father in at least—well, say, twenty-five or six years, anyhow. The last time I did hear from him he was living in Grand Rapids, Michigan, I think, or here. He isn't here now, I presume."

"Oh, no, sir," replied Clyde, who was glad to be able to say this. "The family live in Denver. I'm here all alone."

"Your father and mother are living, I presume."

"Yes, sir. They're both alive."

"Still connected with religious work, is he—your father?"

"Well, yes, sir," answered Clyde, a little dubiously, for he was still convinced that the form of religious work his father essayed was of all forms the poorest and most inconsequential socially. "Only the church he has now," he went on, "has a lodging house connected with it. About forty rooms, I believe. He and my mother run that and the mission too."

"Oh, I see."

He was so anxious to make a better impression on his uncle than the situation seemed to warrant that he was quite willing to exaggerate a little.

"Well, I'm glad they're doing so well," continued Samuel

Griffiths, rather impressed with the trim and vigorous appearance of Clyde. "You like this kind of work, I suppose?"

"Well, not exactly. No, Mr. Griffiths, I don't," replied Clyde quickly, alive at once to the possibilities of this query. "It pays well enough. But I don't like the way you have to make the money you get here. It isn't my idea of a salary at all. But I got in this because I didn't have a chance to study any particular work or get in with some company where there was a real chance to work up and make something of myself. My mother wanted me to write you once and ask whether there was any chance in your company for me to begin and work up, but I was afraid maybe that you might not like that exactly, and so I never did."

He paused, smiling, and yet with an inquiring look in his eye.

His uncle looked solemnly at him for a moment, pleased by his looks and his general manner of approach in this instance, and then replied: "Well, that is very interesting. You should have written, if you wanted to——" Then, as was his custom in all matters, he cautiously paused. Clyde noted that he was hesitating to encourage him.

"I don't suppose there is anything in your company that you would let me do?" he ventured boldly, after a moment.

Samuel Griffiths merely stared at him thoughtfully. He liked and he did not like this direct request. However, Clyde appeared at least a very adaptable person for the purpose. He seemed bright and ambitious—so much like his own son, and he might readily fit into some department as head or assistant under his son, once he had acquired a knowledge of the various manufacturing processes. At any rate he might let him try it. There could be no real harm in that. Besides, there was his younger brother, to whom, perhaps, both he and his older brother Allen owed some form of obligation, if not exactly restitution.

"Well," he said, after a moment, "that is something I would have to think over a little. I wouldn't be able to say, offhand, whether there is or not. We wouldn't be able to pay you as much as you make here to begin with," he warned.

"Oh, that's all right," exclaimed Clyde, who was far more fascinated by the thought of connecting himself with his uncle than anything else. "I wouldn't expect very much until I was able to earn it, of course."

"Besides, it might be that you would find that you didn't like the collar business once you got into it, or we might find we didn't like you. Not every one is suited to it by a long way."

"Well, all you'd have to do then would be to discharge me," assured Clyde. "I've always thought I would be, though, ever since I heard of you and your big company."

This last remark pleased Samuel Griffiths. Plainly he and his achievements had stood in the nature of an ideal to this youth.

"Very well," he said. "I won't be able to give any more time to this now. But I'll be here for a day or two more, anyhow, and I'll think it over. It may be that I will be able to do something for you. I can't say now." And he turned quite abruptly to his letters.

And Clyde, feeling that he had made as good an impression as could be expected under the circumstances and that something might come of it, thanked him profusely and beat a hasty retreat.

The next day, having thought it over and deciding that Clyde, because of his briskness and intelligence, was likely to prove as useful as another, Samuel Griffiths, after due deliberation as to the situation at home, informed Clyde that in case any small opening in the home factory occurred he would be glad to notify him. But he would not even go so far as to guarantee him that an opening would immediately be forthcoming. He must wait.

Accordingly Clyde was left to speculate as to how soon, if ever, a place in his uncle's factory would be made for him.

In the meanwhile Samuel Griffiths had returned to Lycurgus. And after a later conference with his son, he decided that Clyde might be inducted into the very bottom of the business at least—the basement of the Griffiths plant, where the shrinking of all fabrics used in connection with the manufacture of collars was brought about, and where beginners in this industry who really desired to acquire the technique of it were placed, for it was his idea that Clyde by degrees was to be taught the business from top to bottom. And since he must support himself in some form not absolutely incompatible with the standing of the Griffiths family here in Lycurgus, it was decided to pay him the munificent sum of fifteen dollars to begin.

For while Samuel Griffiths, as well as his son Gilbert, realized that this was small pay (not for an ordinary apprentice but for Clyde, since he was a relative) yet so inclined were both toward the practical rather than the charitable in connection with all those who worked for them, that the nearer the beginner in this factory was to the clear mark of necessity and compulsion, the better. Neither could tolerate the socialistic theory relative to capitalistic exploitation. As both saw it, there had to be higher and higher social orders to which the lower social classes could

aspire. One had to have castes. One was foolishly interfering with and disrupting necessary and unavoidable social standards when one tried to unduly favor any one—even a relative. It was necessary when dealing with the classes and intelligences below one, commercially or financially, to handle them according to the standards to which they were accustomed. And the best of these standards were those which held these lower individuals to a clear realization of how difficult it was to come by money—to an understanding of how very necessary it was for all who were engaged in what both considered the only really important constructive work of the world—that of material manufacture—to understand how very essential it was to be drilled, and that sharply and systematically, in all the details and processes which comprise that constructive work. And so to become inured to a narrow and abstemious life in so doing. It was good for their characters. It informed and strengthened the minds and spirits of those who were destined to rise. And those who were not should be kept right where they were.

Accordingly, about a week after that, the nature of Clyde's work having been finally decided upon, a letter was dispatched to him to Chicago by Samuel Griffiths himself in which he set forth that if he chose he might present himself any time now within the next few weeks. But he must give due notice in writing of at least ten days in advance of his appearance in order that he might be properly arranged for. And upon his arrival he was to seek out Mr. Gilbert Griffiths at the office of the mill, who would look after him.

And upon receipt of this Clyde was very much thrilled and at once wrote to his mother that he had actually secured a place with his uncle and was going to Lycurgus. Also that he was going to try to achieve a real success now. Whereupon she wrote him a long letter, urging him to be, oh, so careful of his conduct and associates. Bad companionship was at the root of nearly all of the errors and failures that befell an ambitious youth such as he. If he would only avoid evil-minded or foolish and headstrong boys and girls, all would be well. It was so easy for a young man of his looks and character to be led astray by an evil woman. He had seen what had befallen him in Kansas City. But now he was still young and he was going to work for a man who was very rich and who could do so much for him, if he would. And he was to write her frequently as to the outcome of his efforts here.

And so, after having notified his uncle as he had requested, Clyde finally took his departure for Lycurgus. But on his

arrival there, since his original notification from his uncle had called for no special hour at which to call at the factory, he did not go at once, but instead sought out the one important hotel of Lycurgus, the Lycurgus House.

Then finding himself with ample time on his hands, and very curious about the character of this city in which he was to work, and his uncle's position in it, he set forth to look it over, his thought being that once he reported and began work he might not soon have the time again. He now ambled out into Central Avenue, the very heart of Lycurgus, which in this section was crossed by several business streets, which together with Central Avenue for a few blocks on either side, appeared to constitute the business center—all there was to the life and gayety of Lycurgus.

CHAPTER V

BUT once in this and walking about, how different it all seemed to the world to which so recently he had been accustomed. For here, as he had thus far seen, all was on a so much smaller scale. The depot, from which only a half hour before he had stepped down, was so small and dull, untroubled, as he could plainly see, by much traffic. And the factory section which lay opposite the small city—across the Mohawk—was little more than a red and gray assemblage of buildings with here and there a smokestack projecting upward, and connected with the city by two bridges—a half dozen blocks apart—one of them directly at this depot, a wide traffic bridge across which traveled a car-line following the curves of Central Avenue, dotted here and there with stores and small homes.

But Central Avenue was quite alive with traffic, pedestrians and automobiles. Opposite diagonally from the hotel, which contained a series of wide plate-glass windows, behind which were many chairs interspersed with palms and pillars, was the dry-goods emporium of Stark and Company, a considerable affair, four stories in height, and of white brick, and at least a hundred feet long, the various windows of which seemed bright and interesting, crowded with as smart models as might be seen anywhere. Also there were other large concerns, a second hotel, various automobile showrooms, a moving picture theater.

He found himself ambling on and on until suddenly he was out of the business district again and in touch with a wide and tree-shaded thoroughfare of residences, the houses of which, each and every one, appeared to possess more room space, lawn space, general ease and repose and dignity even than any with which he had ever been in contact. In short, as he sensed it from this brief inspection of its very central portion, it seemed a very exceptional, if small city street—rich, luxurious even. So many imposing wrought-iron fences, flower-bordered walks, grouped trees and bushes, expensive and handsome automobiles either beneath porte-cochères within or speeding along the broad thoroughfare without. And in some neighboring shops—those nearest Central Avenue and the business heart where this wide and

handsome thoroughfare began, were to be seen such expensive-looking and apparently smart displays of the things that might well interest people of means and comfort—motors, jewels, lingerie, leather goods and furniture.

But where now did his uncle and his family live? In which house? What street? Was it larger and finer than any of these he had seen in this street?

He must return at once, he decided, and report to his uncle. He must look up the factory address, probably in that region beyond the river, and go over there and see him. What would he say, how act, what would his uncle set him to doing? What would his cousin Gilbert be like? What would he be likely to think of him? In his last letter his uncle had mentioned his son Gilbert. He retraced his steps along Central Avenue to the depot and found himself quickly before the walls of the very large concern he was seeking. It was of red brick, six stories high—almost a thousand feet long. It was nearly all windows—at least that portion which had been most recently added and which was devoted to collars. An older section, as Clyde later learned, was connected with the newer building by various bridges. And the south walls of both these two structures, being built at the water's edge, paralleled the Mohawk. There were also, as he now found, various entrances along River Street, a hundred feet or more apart—and each one, guarded by an employee in uniform—entrances numbered one, two and three —which were labeled "for employees only"—an entrance numbered four which read "office"—and entrances five and six appeared to be devoted to freight receipts and shipments.

Clyde made his way to the office portion and finding no one to hinder him, passed through two sets of swinging doors and found himself in the presence of a telephone girl seated at a telephone desk behind a railing, in which was set a small gate—the only entrance to the main office apparently. And this she guarded. She was short, fat, thirty-five and unattractive.

"Well?" she called as Clyde appeared.

"I want to see Mr. Gilbert Griffiths," Clyde began a little nervously.

"What about?"

"Well, you see, I'm his cousin. Clyde Griffiths is my name. I have a letter here from my uncle, Mr. Samuel Griffiths. He'll see me, I think."

As he laid the letter before her, he noticed that her quite severe and decidedly indifferent expression changed and became not so much friendly as awed. For obviously she was very much

impressed not only by the information but his looks, and began to examine him slyly and curiously.

"I'll see if he's in," she replied much more civilly, and plugging at the same time a switch which led to Mr. Gilbert Griffiths' private office. Word coming back to her apparently that Mr. Gilbert Griffiths was busy at the moment and could not be disturbed, she called back: "It's Mr. Gilbert's cousin, Mr. Clyde Griffiths. He has a letter from Mr. Samuel Griffiths." Then she said to Clyde: "Won't you sit down? I'm sure Mr. Gilbert Griffiths will see you in a moment. He's busy just now."

And Clyde, noting the unusual deference paid him—a form of deference that never in his life before had been offered him—was strangely moved by it. To think that he should be a full cousin to this wealthy and influential family! This enormous factory! So long and wide and high—as he had seen—six stories. And walking along the opposite side of the river just now, he had seen through several open windows whole rooms full of girls and women hard at work. And he had been thrilled in spite of himself. For somehow the high red walls of the building suggested energy and very material success, a type of success that was almost without flaw, as he saw it.

He looked at the gray plaster walls of this outer waiting chamber—at some lettering on the inner door which read: "The Griffiths Collar & Shirt Company, Inc. Samuel Griffiths, Pres. Gilbert Griffiths, Sec'y."—and wondered what it was all like inside—what Gilbert Griffiths would be like—cold or genial, friendly or unfriendly.

And then, as he sat there meditating, the woman suddenly turned to him and observed: "You can go in now. Mr. Gilbert Griffiths' office is at the extreme rear of this floor, over toward the river. Any one of the clerks inside will show you."

She half rose as if to open the door for him, but Clyde, sensing the intent, brushed by her. "That's all right. Thanks," he said most warmly, and opening the glass-plated door he gazed upon a room housing many over a hundred employees—chiefly young men and young women. And all were apparently intent on their duties before them. Most of them had green shades over their eyes. Quite all of them had on short alpaca office coats or sleeve protectors over their shirt sleeves. Nearly all of the young women wore clean and attractive gingham dresses or office slips. And all about this central space, which was partitionless and supported by round white columns, were offices labeled with the names of the various minor officials and executives of the company—Mr. Smillie, Mr. Latch, Mr. Gotboy, Mr. Burkey.

Since the telephone girl had said that Mr. Gilbert Griffiths was at the extreme rear, Clyde, without much hesitation, made his way along the railed-off aisle to that quarter, where upon a half-open door he read: "Mr. Gilbert Griffiths, Sec'y." He paused, uncertain whether to walk in or not, and then proceeded to tap. At once a sharp, penetrating voice called: "Come," and he entered and faced a youth who looked, if anything, smaller and a little older and certainly much colder and shrewder than himself—such a youth, in short, as Clyde would have liked to imagine himself to be—trained in an executive sense, apparently authoritative and efficient. He was dressed, as Clyde noted at once, in a bright gray suit of a very pronounced pattern, for it was once more approaching spring. His hair, of a lighter shade than Clyde's, was brushed and glazed most smoothly back from his temples and forehead, and his eyes, which Clyde, from the moment he had opened the door had felt drilling him, were of a clear, liquid, grayish-green blue. He had on a pair of large horn-rimmed glasses which he wore at his desk only, and the eyes that peered through them went over Clyde swiftly and notatively, from his shoes to the round brown felt hat which he carried in his hand.

"You're my cousin, I believe," he commented, rather icily, as Clyde came forward and stopped—a thin and certainly not very favorable smile playing about his lips.

"Yes, I am," replied Clyde, reduced and confused by this calm and rather freezing reception. On the instant, as he now saw, he could not possibly have the same regard and esteem for this cousin, as he could and did have for his uncle, whose very great ability had erected this important industry. Rather, deep down in himself he felt that this young man, an heir and nothing more to this great industry, was taking to himself airs and superiorities which, but for his father's skill before him, would not have been possible.

At the same time so groundless and insignificant were his claims to any consideration here, and so grateful was he for anything that might be done for him, that he felt heavily obligated already and tried to smile his best and most ingratiating smile. Yet Gilbert Griffiths at once appeared to take this as a bit of presumption which ought not to be tolerated in a mere cousin, and particularly one who was seeking a favor of him and his father.

However, since his father had troubled to interest himself in him and had given him no alternative, he continued his wry smile and mental examination, the while he said: "We thought

you would be showing up to-day or to-morrow. Did you have a pleasant trip?"

"Oh, yes, very," replied Clyde, a little confused by this inquiry.

"So you think you'd like to learn something about the manufacture of collars, do you?" Tone and manner were infiltrated by the utmost condescension.

"I would certainly like to learn something that would give me a chance to work up, have some future in it," replied Clyde, genially and with a desire to placate his young cousin as much as possible.

"Well, my father was telling me of his talk with you in Chicago. From what he told me I gather that you haven't had much practical experience of any kind. You don't know how to keep books, do you?"

"No, I don't," replied Clyde a little regretfully.

"And you're not a stenographer or anything like that?"

"No, sir, I'm not."

Most sharply, as Clyde said this, he felt that he was dreadfully lacking in every training. And now Gilbert Griffiths looked at him as though he were rather a hopeless proposition indeed from the viewpoint of this concern.

"Well, the best thing to do with you, I think," he went on, as though before this his father had not indicated to him exactly what was to be done in this case, "is to start you in the shrinking room. That's where the manufacturing end of this business begins, and you might as well be learning that from the ground up. Afterwards, when we see how you do down there, we can tell a little better what to do with you. If you had any office training it might be possible to use you up here." (Clyde's face fell at this and Gilbert noticed it. It pleased him.) "But it's just as well to learn the practical side of the business, whatever you do," he added rather coldly, not that he desired to comfort Clyde any but merely to be saying it as a fact. And seeing that Clyde said nothing, he continued: "The best thing, I presume, before you try to do anything around here is for you to get settled somewhere. You haven't taken a room anywhere yet, have you?"

"No, I just came in on the noon train," replied Clyde. "I was a little dirty and so I just went up to the hotel to brush up a little. I thought I'd look for a place afterwards."

"Well, that's right. Only don't look for any place. I'll have our superintendent see that you're directed to a good boarding house. He knows more about the town than you do." His

thought here was that after all Clyde was a full cousin and that it wouldn't do to have him live just anywhere. At the same time he was greatly concerned lest Clyde get the notion that the family was very much concerned as to where he did live, which most certainly it was *not,* as he saw it. His final feeling was that he could easily place and control Clyde in such a way as to make him not very important to any one in any way—his father, the family, all the people who worked here.

He reached for a button on his desk and pressed it. A trim girl, very severe and reserved in a green gingham dress, appeared.

"Ask Mr. Whiggam to come here."

She disappeared and presently there entered a medium-sized and nervous, yet moderately stout, man who looked as though he were under a great strain. He was about forty years of age—repressed and noncommittal—and looked curiously and suspiciously about as though wondering what new trouble impended. His head, as Clyde at once noticed, appeared chronically to incline forward, while at the same time he lifted his eyes as though actually he would prefer not to look up.

"Whiggam," began young Griffiths authoritatively, "this is Clyde Griffiths, a cousin of ours. You remember I spoke to you about him."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, he's to be put in the shrinking department for the present. You can show him what he's to do. Afterwards you had better have Mrs. Braley show him where he can get a room." (All this had been talked over and fixed upon the week before by Gilbert and Whiggam, but now he gave it the ring of an original suggestion.) "And you'd better give his name in to the timekeeper as beginning to-morrow morning, see?"

"Yes, sir," bowed Whiggam deferentially. "Is that all?"

"Yes, that's all," concluded Gilbert smartly. "You go with Whiggam, Mr. Griffiths. He'll tell you what to do."

Whiggam turned. "If you'll just come with me, Mr. Griffiths," he observed deferentially, as Clyde could see—and that for all of his cousin's apparently condescending attitude—and marched out with Clyde at his heels. And young Gilbert as briskly turned to his own desk, but at the same time shaking his head. His feeling at the moment was that mentally Clyde was not above a good bell-boy in a city hotel probably. Else why should he come on here in this way. "I wonder what he thinks he's going to do here," he continued to think, "where he thinks he's going to get?"

And Clyde, as he followed Mr. Whiggam, was thinking what a wonderful place Mr. Gilbert Griffiths enjoyed. No doubt he came and went as he chose—arrived at the office late, departed early, and somewhere in this very interesting city dwelt with his parents and sisters in a very fine house—of course. And yet here he was—Gilbert's own cousin, and the nephew of his wealthy uncle, being escorted to work in a very minor department of this great concern.

Nevertheless, once they were out of the sight and hearing of Mr. Gilbert Griffiths, he was somewhat diverted from this mood by the sights and sounds of the great manufactory itself. For here on this very same floor, but beyond the immense office room through which he had passed, was another much larger room filled with rows of bins, facing aisles not more than five feet wide, and containing, as Clyde could see, enormous quantities of collars boxed in small paper boxes, according to sizes. These bins were either being refilled by stock boys who brought more boxed collars from the boxing room in large wooden trucks, or were being as rapidly emptied by order clerks who, trundling small box trucks in front of them, were filling orders from duplicate check lists which they carried in their hands.

"Never worked in a collar factory before, Mr. Griffiths, I presume?" commented Mr. Whiggam with somewhat more spirit, once he was out of the presence of Gilbert Griffiths. Clyde noticed at once the Mr. Griffiths.

"Oh, no," he replied quickly. "I never worked at anything like this before."

"Expect to learn all about the manufacturing end of the game in the course of time, though, I suppose." He was walking briskly along one of the long aisles as he spoke, but Clyde noticed that he shot sly glances in every direction.

"I'd like to," he answered.

"Well, there's a little more to it than some people think, although you often hear there isn't very much to learn." He opened another door, crossed a gloomy hall and entered still another room which, filled with bins as was the other, was piled high in every bin with bolts of white cloth.

"You might as well know a little about this as long as you're going to begin in the shrinking room. This is the stuff from which the collars are cut, the collars and the lining. They are called webs. Each of these bolts is a web. We take these down in the basement and shrink them because they can't be used this way. If they are, the collars would shrink after they were cut. But you'll see. We tub them and then dry them afterwards."

He marched solemnly on and Clyde sensed once more that this man was not looking upon him as an ordinary employee by any means. His *Mr.* Griffiths, his supposition to the effect that Clyde was to learn all about the manufacturing end of the business, as well as his condescension in explaining about these webs of cloth, had already convinced Clyde that he was looked upon as one to whom some slight homage at least must be paid.

He followed Mr. Whiggam, curious as to the significance of this, and soon found himself in an enormous basement which had been reached by descending a flight of steps at the end of a third hall. Here, by the help of four long rows of incandescent lamps, he discerned row after row of porcelain tubs or troughs, lengthwise of the room, and end to end, which reached from one exterior wall to the other. And in these, under steaming hot water apparently, were any quantity of those same webs he had just seen upstairs, soaking. And near-by, north and south of these tubs, and paralleling them for the length of this room, all of a hundred and fifty feet in length, were enormous drying racks or moving skeleton platforms, boxed, top and bottom and sides, with hot steam pipes, between which on rolls, but festooned in such a fashion as to take advantage of these pipes, above, below and on either side, were more of these webs, but unwound and wet and draped as described, yet moving along slowly on these rolls from the east end of the room to the west. This movement, as Clyde could see, was accompanied by an enormous rattle and clatter of ratchet arms which automatically shook and moved these lengths of cloth forward from east to west. And as they moved they dried, and were then automatically re-wound at the west end of these racks into bolt form once more upon a wooden spool and then lifted off by a youth whose duty it was to "take" from these moving platforms. One youth, as Clyde saw, "took" from two of these tracks at the west end, while at the east end another youth of about his own years "fed." That is, he took bolts of this now partially shrunk yet still wet cloth and attaching one end of it to some moving hooks, saw that it slowly and properly unwound and fed itself over the drying racks for the entire length of these tracks. As fast as it had gone the way of all webs, another was attached.

Between each two rows of tubs in the center of the room were enormous whirling separators or dryers, into which these webs of cloth, as they came from the tubs in which they had been shrinking for twenty-four hours, were piled and as much water as possible centrifugally extracted before they were spread out on the drying racks.

Primarily little more than this mere physical aspect of the room was grasped by Clyde—its noise, its heat, its steam, the energy with which a dozen men and boys were busying themselves with various processes. They were, without exception, clothed only in armless undershirts, a pair of old trousers belted in at the waist, and with canvas-topped and rubber-soled sneakers on their bare feet. The water and the general dampness and the heat of the room seemed obviously to necessitate some such dressing as this.

"This is the shrinking room," observed Mr. Whiggam, as they entered. "It isn't as nice as some of the others, but it's where the manufacturing process begins. Kemerer!" he called.

A short, stocky, full-chested man, with a pale, full face and white, strong-looking arms, dressed in a pair of dirty and wrinkled trousers and an armless flannel shirt, now appeared. Like Whiggam in the presence of Gilbert, he appeared to be very much overawed in the presence of Whiggam.

"This is Clyde Griffiths, the cousin of Gilbert Griffiths. I spoke to you about him last week, you remember?"

"Yes, sir."

"He's to begin down here. He'll show up in the morning."

"Yes, sir."

"Better put his name down on your check list. He'll begin at the usual hour."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Whiggam, as Clyde noticed, held his head higher and spoke more directly and authoritatively than at any time so far. He seemed to be master, not underling, now.

"Seven-thirty is the time every one goes to work here in the morning," went on Mr. Whiggam to Clyde informatively, "but they all ring in a little earlier—about seven-twenty or so, so as to have time to change their clothes and get to the machines.

"Now, if you want to," he added, "Mr. Kemerer can show you what you'll have to do to-morrow before you leave to-day. It might save a little time. Or, you can leave it until then if you want to. It don't make any difference to me. Only, if you'll come back to the telephone girl at the main entrance about five-thirty I'll have Mrs. Braley there for you. She's to show you about your room, I believe. I won't be there myself, but you just ask the telephone girl for her. She'll know." He turned and added, "Well, I'll leave you now."

He lowered his head and started to go away just as Clyde began. "Well, I'm very much obliged to you, Mr. Whiggam." Instead of answering, he waved one fishy hand slightly upward

and was gone—down between the tubs toward the west door. And at once Mr. Kemerer—still nervous and overawed apparently—began.

"Oh, that's all right about what you have to do, Mr. Griffiths. I'll just let you bring down webs on the floor above to begin with to-morrow. But if you've got any old clothes, you'd better put 'em on. A suit like that wouldn't last long here." He eyed Clyde's very neat, if inexpensive suit, in an odd way. His manner, quite like that of Mr. Whiggam before him, was a mixture of uncertainty and a very small authority here in Clyde's case—of extreme respect and yet some private doubt, which only time might resolve. Obviously it was no small thing to be a Griffiths here, even if one were a cousin and possibly not as welcome to one's powerful relatives as one might be.

At first sight, and considering what his general dreams in connection with this industry were, Clyde was inclined to rebel. For the type of youth and man he saw here were in his estimation and at first glance rather below the type of individuals he hoped to find here—individuals neither so intelligent nor alert as those employed by the Union League and the Green-Davidson by a long distance. And still worse he felt them to be much more subdued and sly and ignorant—mere clocks, really. And their eyes, as he entered with Mr. Whiggam, while they pretended not to be looking, were very well aware, as Clyde could feel, of all that was going on. Indeed, he and Mr. Whiggam were the center of all their secret looks. At the same time, their spare and practical manner of dressing struck dead at one blow any thought of refinement in connection with the work in here. How unfortunate that his lack of training would not permit his being put to office work or something like that upstairs.

He walked with Mr. Kemerer, who troubled to say that these were the tubs in which the webs were shrunk over night —these the centrifugal dryers—these the rack dryers. Then he was told that he could go. And by then it was only three o'clock.

He made his way out of the nearest door and once outside he congratulated himself on being connected with this great company, while at the same time wondering whether he was going to prove satisfactory to Mr. Kemerer and Mr. Whiggam. Supposing he didn't. Or supposing he couldn't stand all this? It was pretty rough. Well, if worst came to worst, as he now thought, he could go back to Chicago, or on to New York, maybe, and get work.

But why hadn't Samuel Griffiths had the graciousness to receive and welcome him? Why had that young Gilbert Griffiths smiled so cynically? And what sort of a woman was this Mrs. Braley? Had he done wisely to come on here? Would this family do anything for him now that he was here?

It was thus that, strolling west along River Street on which were a number of other kinds of factories, and then north through a few other streets that held more factories—tinware, wickwire, a big vacuum carpet cleaning plant, a rug manufacturing company, and the like—that he came finally upon a miserable slum, the like of which, small as it was, he had not seen outside of Chicago or Kansas City. He was so irritated and depressed by the poverty and social angularity and crudeness of it—all spelling but one thing, social misery, to him—that he at once retraced his steps and recrossing the Mohawk by a bridge farther west soon found himself in an area which was very different indeed—a region once more of just such homes as he had been admiring before he left for the factory. And walking still farther south, he came upon that same wide and tree-lined avenue—which he had seen before—the exterior appearance of which alone identified it as the principal residence thoroughfare of Lycurgus. It was so very broad and well-paved and lined by such an arresting company of houses. At once he was very much alive to the personnel of this street, for it came to him immediately that it must be in this street very likely that his uncle Samuel lived. The houses were nearly all of French, Italian or English design, and excellent period copies at that, although he did not know it.

Impressed by their beauty and spaciousness, however, he walked along, now looking at one and another, and wondering which, if any, of these was occupied by his uncle, and deeply impressed by the significance of so much wealth. How superior and condescending his cousin Gilbert must feel, walking out of some such place as this in the morning.

Then pausing before one which, because of trees, walks, newly-groomed if bloomless flower beds, a large garage at the rear, a large fountain to the left of the house as he faced it, in the center of which was a boy holding a swan in his arms, and to the right of the house one lone cast iron stag pursued by some cast iron dogs, he felt especially impelled to admire, and charmed by the dignity of this place, which was a modified form of old English, he now inquired of a stranger who was passing—a middle-aged man of a rather shabby working type, "Whose house

is that, mister?" and the man replied: "Why, that's Samuel Griffiths' residence. He's the man who owns the big collar factory over the river."

At once Clyde straightened up, as though dashed with cold water. His uncle's! His residence! Then that was one of his automobiles standing before the garage at the rear there. And there was another visible through the open door of the garage.

Indeed in his immature and really psychically unilluminated mind it suddenly evoked a mood which was as of roses, perfumes, lights and music. The beauty! The ease! What member of his own immediate family had ever even dreamed that his uncle lived thus! The grandeur! And his own parents so wretched—so poor, preaching on the streets of Kansas City and no doubt Denver. Conducting a mission! And although thus far no single member of this family other than his chill cousin had troubled to meet him, and that at the factory only, and although he had been so indifferently assigned to the menial type of work that he had, still he was elated and uplifted. For, after all, was he not a Griffiths, a full cousin as well as a full nephew to the two very important men who lived here, and now working for them in some capacity at least? And must not that spell a future of some sort, better than any he had known as yet? For consider who the Griffiths were here, as opposed to "who" the Griffiths were in Kansas City, say—or Denver. The enormous difference! A thing to be as carefully concealed as possible. At the same time, he was immediately reduced again, for supposing the Griffiths here—his uncle or his cousin or some friend or agent of theirs—should now investigate his parents and his past? Heavens! The matter of that slain child in Kansas City! His parents' miserable makeshift life! Esta! At once his face fell, his dreams being so thickly clouded over. If they should guess! If they should sense!

Oh, the devil—who was he anyway? And what did he really amount to? What could he hope for from such a great world as this really, once they knew why he had troubled to come here?

A little disgusted and depressed he turned to retrace his steps, for all at once he felt himself very much of a nobody.

CHAPTER VI

THE room which Clyde secured this same day with the aid of Mrs. Braley, was in Thorpe Street, a thoroughfare enormously removed in quality if not in distance from that in which his uncle resided. Indeed the difference was sufficient to decidedly qualify his mounting notions of himself as one who, after all, was connected with him. The commonplace brown or gray or tan colored houses, rather smoked or decayed which fronted it—the leafless and winter harried trees which in spite of smoke and dust seemed to give promise of the newer life so near at hand—the leaves and flowers of May. Yet as he walked into it with Mrs. Braley, many drab and commonplace figures of men and girls, and elderly spinsters resembling Mrs. Braley in kind, were making their way home from the several factories beyond the river. And at the door Mrs. Braley and himself were received by a none-too-polished woman in a clean gingham apron over a dark brown dress, who led the way to a second floor room, not too small or uncomfortably furnished—which she assured him he could have for four dollars without board or seven and one-half dollars with—a proposition which, seeing that he was advised by Mrs. Braley that this was somewhat better than he would get in most places for the same amount, he decided to take. And here, after thanking Mrs. Braley, he decided to remain—later sitting down to dinner with a small group of milltown store and factory employees, such as partially he had been accustomed to in Paulina Street in Chicago, before moving to the better atmosphere of the Union League. And after dinner he made his way out into the principal thoroughfares of Lycurgus, only to observe such a crowd of nondescript mill-workers as, judging these streets by day, he would not have fancied swarmed here by night—girls and boys, men and women of various nationalities, and types—Americans, Poles, Hungarians, French, English—and for the most part—if not entirely touched with a peculiar something—ignorance or thickness of mind or body, or with a certain lack of taste and alertness or daring, which seemed to mark them one and all as of the basement world which he had seen only this afternoon. Yet in some streets and stores, particularly those nearer Wykeagy Avenue, a

better type of girl and young man who might have been and no doubt were of the various office groups of the different companies over the river—neat and active.

And Clyde, walking to and fro, from eight until ten, when as though by pre-arrangement, the crowd in the more congested streets seemed suddenly to fade away, leaving them quite vacant. And throughout this time contrasting it all with Chicago and Kansas City. (What would Ratterer think if he could see him now—his uncle's great house and factory?) And perhaps because of its smallness, liking it—the Lycurgus Hotel, neat and bright and with a brisk local life seeming to center about it. And the post-office and a handsomely spired church, together with an old and interesting graveyard, cheek by jowl with an automobile salesroom. And a new moving picture theater just around the corner in a side street. And various boys and girls, men and women, walking here and there, some of them flirting as Clyde could see. And with a suggestion somehow hovering over it all of hope and zest and youth—the hope and zest and youth that is at the bottom of all the constructive energy of the world everywhere. And finally returning to his room in Thorpe Street with the conclusion that he did like the place and would like to stay here. That beautiful Wykeagy Avenue! His uncle's great factory! The many pretty and eager girls he had seen hurrying to and fro!

In the meantime, in so far as Gilbert Griffiths was concerned, and in the absence of his father, who was in New York at the time (a fact which Clyde did not know and of which Gilbert did not trouble to inform him) he had conveyed to his mother and sisters that he had met Clyde, and if he were not the dullest, certainly he was not the most interesting person in the world, either. Encountering Myra, as he first entered at five-thirty, the same day that Clyde had appeared, he troubled to observe: "Well, that Chicago cousin of ours blew in to-day."

"Yes!" commented Myra, "What's he like?" The fact that her father had described Clyde as gentlemanly and intelligent had interested her, although knowing Lycurgus and the nature of the mill life here and its opportunities for those who worked in factories such as her father owned, she had wondered why Clyde had bothered to come.

"Well, I can't see that he's so much," replied Gilbert. "He's fairly intelligent and not bad-looking, but he admits that he's never had any business training of any kind. He's like all those young fellows who work for hotels. He thinks clothes are the

whole thing, I guess. He had on a light brown suit and a brown tie and hat to match and brown shoes. His tie was too bright and he had on one of those bright pink striped shirts like they used to wear three or four years ago. Besides his clothes aren't cut right. I didn't want to say anything because he's just come on, and we don't know whether he'll hold out or not. But if he does, and he's going to pose around as a relative of ours, he'd better tone down, or I'd advise the governor to have a few words with him. Outside of that I guess he'll do well enough in one of the departments after a while, as foreman or something. He might even be made into a salesman later on, I suppose. But what he sees in all that to make it worth while to come here is more than I can guess. As a matter of fact, I don't think the governor made it clear to him just how few the chances are here for any one who isn't really a wizard or something."

He stood with his back to the large open fireplace.

"Oh, well, you know what Mother was saying the other day about his father. She thinks Daddy feels that he's never had a chance in some way. He'll probably do something for him whether he wants to keep him in the mill or not. She told me that she thought that Dad felt that his father hadn't been treated just right by their father."

Myra paused, and Gilbert, who had had this same hint from his mother before now, chose to ignore the implication of it.

"Oh, well, it's not my funeral," he went on. "If the governor wants to keep him on here whether he's fitted for anything special or not, that's his look-out. Only he's the one that's always talking about efficiency in every department and cutting and keeping out dead timber."

Meeting his mother and Bella later, he volunteered the same news and much the same ideas. Mrs. Griffiths sighed; for after all, in a place like Lycurgus and established as they were, any one related to them and having their name ought to be most circumspect and have careful manners and taste and judgment. It was not wise for her husband to bring on any one who was not all of that and more.

On the other hand, Bella was by no means satisfied with the accuracy of her brother's picture of Clyde. She did not know Clyde, but she did know Gilbert, and as she knew he could decide very swiftly that this or that person was lacking in almost every way, when, as a matter of fact, they might not be at all as she saw it.

"Oh, well," she finally observed, after hearing Gilbert com-

ment on more of Clyde's peculiarities at dinner, "if Daddy wants him, I presume he'll keep him, or do something with him eventually." At which Gilbert winced internally for this was a direct slap at his assumed authority in the mill under his father, which authority he was eager to make more and more effective in every direction, as his younger sister well knew.

In the meanwhile on the following morning, Clyde, returning to the mill, found that the name, or appearance, or both perhaps—his resemblance to Mr. Gilbert Griffiths—was of some peculiar advantage to him which he could not quite sufficiently estimate at present. For on reaching number one entrance, the doorman on guard there looked as though startled.

"Oh, you're Mr. Clyde Griffiths?" he queried. "You're goin' to work under Mr. Kemerer? Yes, I know. Well, that man there will have your key," and he pointed to a stodgy, stuffy old man whom later Clyde came to know as "Old Jeff," the time-clock guard, who, at a stand farther along this same hall, furnished and reclaimed all keys between seven-thirty and seven-forty.

When Clyde approached him and said: "My name's Clyde Griffiths and I'm to work downstairs with Mr. Kemerer," he too started and then said: "Sure, that's right. Yes, sir. Here you are, Mr. Griffiths. Mr. Kemerer spoke to me about you yesterday. Number seventy-one is to be yours. I'm giving you Mr. Duveny's old key." When Clyde had gone down the stairs into the shrinking department, he turned to the doorman who had drawn near and exclaimed: "Don't it beat all how much that fellow looks like Mr. Gilbert Griffiths? Why, he's almost his spittin' image. What is he, do you suppose, a brother or a cousin, or what?"

"Don't ask me," replied the doorman. "I never saw him before. But he's certainly related to the family all right. When I seen him first, I thought it was Mr. Gilbert. I was just about to tip my hat to him when I saw it wasn't."

And in the shrinking room when he entered, as on the day before, he found Kemerer as respectful and evasive as ever. For, like Whiggam before him, Kemerer had not as yet been able to decide what Clyde's true position with this company was likely to be. For, as Whiggam had informed Kemerer the day before, Mr. Gilbert had said no least thing which tended to make Mr. Whiggam believe that things were to be made especially easy for him, nor yet hard, either. On the contrary, Mr. Gilbert had said: "He's to be treated like all the other employees as to time and work. No different." Yet in intro-

ducing Clyde he had said: "This is my cousin, and he's going to try to learn this business," which would indicate that as time went on Clyde was to be transferred from department to department until he had surveyed the entire manufacturing end of the business.

Whiggam, for this reason, after Clyde had gone, whispered to Kemerer as well as to several others, that Clyde might readily prove to be some one who was a protégé of the chief—and therefore they determined to "watch their step," at least until they knew what his standing here was to be. And Clyde, noticing this, was quite set up by it, for he could not help but feel that this in itself, and apart from whatever his cousin Gilbert might either think or wish to do, might easily presage some favor on the part of his uncle that might lead to some good for him. So when Kemerer proceeded to explain to him that he was not to think that the work was so very hard or that there was so very much to do for the present, Clyde took it with a slight air of condescension. And in consequence Kemerer was all the more respectful.

"Just hang up your hat and coat over there in one of those lockers," he proceeded mildly and ingratiatingly even. "Then you can take one of those crate trucks back there and go up to the next floor and bring down some webs. They'll show you where to get them."

The days that followed were diverting and yet troublesome enough to Clyde, who to begin with was puzzled and disturbed at times by the peculiar social and workaday worlds and position in which he found himself. For one thing, those by whom now he found himself immediately surrounded at the factory were not such individuals as he would ordinarily select for companions—far below bell-boys or drivers or clerks anywhere. They were, one and all, as he could now clearly see, meaty or stodgy mentally and physically. They wore such clothes as only the most common laborers would wear—such clothes as are usually worn by those who count their personal appearance among the least of their troubles—their work and their heavy material existence being all. In addition, not knowing just what Clyde was, or what his coming might mean to their separate and individual positions, they were inclined to be dubious and suspicious.

After a week or two, however, coming to understand that Clyde was a nephew of the president, a cousin of the secretary of the company, and hence not likely to remain here long in any menial capacity, they grew more friendly, but inclined in

the face of the sense of subserviency which this inspired in them, to become jealous and suspicious of him in another way. For, after all, Clyde was not one of them, and under such circumstances could not be. He might smile and be civil enough—yet he would always be in touch with those who were above them, would he not—or so they thought. He was, as they saw it, part of the rich and superior class and every poor man knew what that meant. The poor must stand together everywhere.

For his part, however, and sitting about for the first few days in this particular room eating his lunch, he wondered how these men could interest themselves in what were to him such dull and uninteresting items—the quality of the cloth that was coming down in the webs—some minute flaws in the matter of weight or weave—the last twenty webs hadn't looked so closely shrunk as the preceding sixteen; or the Cranston Wickwire Company was not carrying as many men as it had the month before—or the Anthony Woodenware Company had posted a notice that the Saturday half-holiday would not begin before June first this year as opposed to the middle of May last year. They all appeared to be lost in the humdrum and routine of their work.

In consequence his mind went back to happier scenes. He wished at times he were back in Chicago or Kansas City. He thought of Ratterer, Hegglund, Higby, Louise Ratterer, Larry Doyle, Mr. Squires, Hortense—all of the young and thoughtless company of which he had been a part, and wondered what they were doing. What had become of Hortense? She had got that fur coat after all—probably from that cigar clerk and then had gone away with him after she had protested so much feeling for him—the little beast. After she had gotten all that money out of him. The mere thought of her and all that she might have meant to him if things had not turned as they had, made him a little sick at times. To whom was she being nice now? How had she found things since leaving Kansas City? And what would she think if she saw him here now or knew of his present high connections? Gee! That would cool her a little. But she would not think much of his present position. That was sure. But she might respect him more if she could see his uncle and his cousin and this factory and their big house. It would be like her then to try to be nice to him. Well, he would show her, if he ever ran into her again—snub her, of course, as no doubt he very well could by then.

CHAPTER VII

IN so far as his life at Mrs. Cuppy's went, he was not so very happily placed there, either. For that was but a commonplace rooming and boarding house, which drew to it, at best, such conservative mill and business types as looked on work and their wages, and the notions of the middle class religious world of Lycurgus as most essential to the order and well being of the world. From the point of view of entertainment or gayety, it was in the main a very dull place.

At the same time, because of the presence of one Walter Dillard—a brainless sprig who had recently come here from Fonda, it was not wholly devoid of interest for Clyde. The latter—a youth of about Clyde's own age and equally ambitious socially—but without Clyde's tact or discrimination anent the governing facts of life, was connected with the men's furnishing department of Stark and Company. He was spry, avid, attractive enough physically, with very light hair, a very light and feeble mustache, and the delicate airs and ways of a small town Beau Brummell. Never having had any social standing or the use of any means whatsoever—his father having been a small town dry goods merchant before him, who had failed—he was, because of some atavistic spur or filip in his own blood, most anxious to attain some sort of social position.

But failing that so far, he was interested in and envious of those who had it—much more so than Clyde, even. The glory and activity of the leading families of this particular city had enormous weight with him—the Nicholsons, the Starks, the Harriets, Griffiths, Finchleys, et cetera. And learning a few days after Clyde's arrival of his somewhat left-handed connection with this world, he was most definitely interested. What? A Griffiths! The nephew of the rich Samuel Griffiths of Lycurgus! And in this boarding house! Beside him at this table! At once his interest rose to where he decided that he must cultivate this stranger as speedily as possible. Here was a real social opportunity knocking at his very door—a connecting link to one of the very best families! And besides was he not young, attractive and probably ambitious like himself—a fellow to play around

with if one could? He proceeded at once to make overtures to Clyde. It seemed almost too good to be true.

In consequence he was quick to suggest a walk, the fact that there was a certain movie just on at the Mohawk, which was excellent—very snappy. Didn't Clyde want to go? And because of his neatness, smartness—a touch of something that was far from humdrum or the heavy practicality of the mill and the remainder of this boarding house world, Clyde was inclined to fall in with him.

But, as he now thought, here were his great relatives and he must watch his step here. Who knew but that he might be making a great mistake in holding such free and easy contacts as this. The Griffiths—as well as the entire world of which they were a part—as he guessed from the general manner of all those who even contacted him, must be very removed from the commonalty here. More by instinct than reason, he was inclined to stand off and look very superior—more so since those, including this very youth on whom he practised this seemed to respect him the more. And although upon eager—and even—after its fashion, supplicating request, he now went with this youth—still he went cautiously. And his aloof and condescending manner Dillard at once translated as "class" and "connection." And to think he had met him in this dull, dubby boarding house here. And on his arrival—at the very inception of his career here.

And so his manner was that of the sycophant—although he had a better position and was earning more money than Clyde was at this time, twenty-two dollars a week.

"I suppose you'll be spending a good deal of your time with your relatives and friends here," he volunteered on the occasion of their first walk together, and after he had extracted as much information as Clyde cared to impart, which was almost nothing, while he volunteered a few, most decidedly furbished bits from his own history. His father owned a dry goods store *now*. He had come over here to study other methods, et cetera. He had an uncle here—connected with Stark and Company. He had met a few—not so many as yet—nice people here, since he hadn't been here so very long himself—four months all told.

But Clyde's relatives!

"Say, your uncle must be worth over a million, isn't he? They say he is. Those houses in Wykeagy Avenue are certainly the cats'. You won't see anything finer in Albany or Utica or Rochester either. Are you Samuel Griffiths' own nephew? You don't say! Well, that'll certainly mean a lot to you here. I wish I had a connection like that. You bet I'd make it count."

He beamed on Clyde eagerly and hopefully, and through him Clyde sensed even more how really important this blood relation was. Only think how much it meant to this strange youth.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Clyde dubiously, and yet very much flattered by this assumption of intimacy. "I came on to learn the collar business, you know. Not to play about very much. My uncle wants me to stick to that, pretty much."

"Sure, sure. I know how that is," replied Dillard, "that's the way my uncle feels about me, too. He wants me to stick close to the work here and not play about very much. He's the buyer for Stark and Company, you know. But still a man can't work all the time, either. He's got to have a little fun."

"Yes, that's right," said Clyde—for the first time in his life a little condescendingly.

They walked along in silence for a few moments. Then:

"Do you dance?"

"Yes," answered Clyde.

"Well, so do I. There are a lot of cheap dance halls around here, but I never go to any of those. You can't do it and keep in with the nice people. This is an awfully close town that way, they say. The best people won't have anything to do with you unless you go with the right crowd. It's the same way up at Fonda. You have to 'belong' or you can't go out anywhere at all. And that's right, I guess. But still there are a lot of nice girls here that a fellow can go with—girls of right nice families—not in society, of course—but still, they're not talked about, see. And they're not so slow, either. Pretty hot stuff, some of them. And you don't have to marry any of 'em, either." Clyde began to think of him as perhaps a little too lusty for this new life here, maybe. At the same time he liked him some. "By the way," went on Dillard, "what are you doing next Sunday afternoon?"

"Well, nothing in particular, that I know of just now," replied Clyde, sensing a new problem here. "I don't know just what I may have to do by then, but I don't know of anything now."

"Well, how'd you like to come with me, if you're not too busy. I've come to know quite a few girls since I've been here. Nice ones. I can take you out and introduce you to my uncle's family, if you like. They're nice people. And afterwards—I know two girls we can go and see—peaches. One of 'em did work in the store, but she don't now—she's not doing anything now. The other is her pal. They have a victrola and they can dance. I know it isn't the thing to dance here on Sundays but no one

need know anything about that. The girls' parents don't mind. Afterwards we might take 'em to a movie or something—if you want to—not any of those things down near the mill district but one of the better ones—see?"

There formulated itself in Clyde's mind the question as to what, in regard to just such proposals as this, his course here was to be. In Chicago, and recently—because of what happened in Kansas City—he had sought to be as retiring and cautious as possible. For—after that and while connected with the club, he had been taken with the fancy of trying to live up to the ideals with which the seemingly stern face of that institution had inspired him—conservatism—hard work—saving one's money—looking neat and gentlemanly. It was such an Eveless paradise, that.

In spite of his quiet surroundings here, however, the very air of the city seemed to suggest some such relaxation as this youth was now suggesting—a form of diversion that was probably innocent enough but still connected with girls and their entertainment—there were so many of them here, as he could see. These streets, after dinner, here, were so alive with good-looking girls, and young men, too. But what might his new found relatives think of him in case he was seen stepping about in the manner and spirit which this youth's suggestions seemed to imply? Hadn't he just said that this was an awfully close town and that everybody knew nearly everything about everybody else? He paused in doubt. He must decide now. And then, being lonely and hungry for companionship, he replied: "Yes,—well—I think that's all right." But he added a little dubiously: "Of course my relatives here——"

"Oh, sure, that's all right," replied Dillard smartly. "You have to be careful, of course. Well, so do I." If he could only go around with a Griffiths, even if he was new around here and didn't know many people—wouldn't it reflect a lot of credit on him? It most certainly would—did already, as he saw it.

And forthwith he offered to buy Clyde some cigarettes—a soda—anything he liked. But Clyde, still feeling very strange and uncertain, excused himself, after a time, because this youth with his complacent worship of society and position, annoyed him a little, and made his way back to his room. He had promised his mother a letter and he thought he had better go back and write it, and incidentally to think a little on the wisdom of this new contact.

CHAPTER VIII

NEVERTHELESS, the next day being a Saturday and a half holiday the year round in this concern, Mr. Whiggam came through with the pay envelopes.

"Here you are, Mr. Griffiths," he said, as though he were especially impressed with Clyde's position.

Clyde, taking it, was rather pleased with this mistering, and going back toward his locker, promptly tore it open and pocketed the money. After that, taking his hat and coat, he wandered off in the direction of his room, where he had his lunch. But, being very lonely, and Dillard not being present because he had to work, he decided upon a trolley ride to Gloversville, which was a city of some twenty thousand inhabitants and reported to be as active, if not as beautiful, as Lycurgus. And that trip amused and interested him because it took him into a city very different from Lycurgus in its social texture.

But the next day—Sunday—he spent idly in Lycurgus, wandering about by himself. For, as it turned out, Dillard was compelled to return to Fonda for some reason and could not fulfill the Sunday understanding. Encountering Clyde, however, on Monday evening, he announced that on the following Wednesday evening, in the basement of the Diggby Avenue Congregational Church, there was to be held a social with refreshments. And according to young Dillard, at least this promised to prove worth while.

"We can just go out there," was the way he put it to Clyde, "and buzz the girls a little. I want you to meet my uncle and aunt. They're nice people all right. And so are the girls. They're no slouches. Then we can edge out afterwards, about ten, see, and go around to either Zella or Rita's place. Rita has more good records over at her place, but Zella has the nicest place to dance. By the way, you didn't chance to bring along your dress suit with you, did you?" he inquired. For having already inspected Clyde's room, which was above his own on the third floor, in Clyde's absence and having discovered that he had only a dress suit case and no trunk, and apparently no dress suit anywhere, he had decided that in spite of Clyde's father

conducting a hotel and Clyde having worked in the Union League Club in Chicago, he must be very indifferent to social equipment. Or, if not, must be endeavoring to make his own way on some character-building plan without help from any one. This was not to his liking, exactly. A man should never neglect these social essentials. Nevertheless, Clyde was a Griffiths and that was enough to cause him to overlook nearly anything, for the present anyhow.

"No, I didn't," replied Clyde, who was not exactly sure as to the value of this adventure—even yet—in spite of his own loneliness,—"but I intend to get one." He had already thought since coming here of his lack in this respect, and was thinking of taking at least thirty-five of his more recently hard-earned savings and indulging in a suit of this kind.

Dillard buzzed on about the fact that while Zella Shuman's family wasn't rich—they owned the house they lived in—still she went with a lot of nice girls here, too. So did Rita Dickerman. Zella's father owned a little cottage upon Eckert Lake, near Fonda. When next summer came—and with it the holidays and pleasant week-ends, he and Clyde, supposing that Clyde liked Rita, might go up there some time for a visit, for Rita and Zella were inseparable almost. And they were pretty, too. "Zella's dark and Rita's light," he added enthusiastically.

Clyde was interested by the fact that the girls were pretty and that out of a clear sky and in the face of his present loneliness, he was being made so much of by this Dillard. But, was it wise for him to become very much involved with him? That was the question—for, after all, he really knew nothing of him. And he gathered from Dillard's manner, his flighty enthusiasm for the occasion, that he was far more interested in the girls as girls—a certain freedom or concealed looseness that characterized them—than he was in the social phase of the world which they represented. And wasn't that what brought about his downfall in Kansas City? Here in Lycurgus, of all places, he was least likely to forget it—aspiring to something better as he now did.

None-the-less, at eight-thirty on the following Wednesday evening—they were off, Clyde full of eager anticipation. And by nine o'clock they were in the midst of one of those semi-religious, semi-social and semi-emotional church affairs, the object of which was to raise money for the church—the general service of which was to furnish an occasion for gossip among the elders, criticism and a certain amount of enthusiastic, if disguised courtship and flirtation among the younger members. There were booths for the sale of quite everything from pies, cakes and ice

cream to laces, dolls and knickknacks of every description, supplied by the members and parted with for the benefit of the church. The Reverend Peter Isreals, the minister, and his wife were present. Also Dillard's uncle and aunt, a pair of brisk and yet uninteresting people whom Clyde could sense were of no importance socially here. They were too genial and altogether social in the specific neighborhood sense, although Grover Wilson, being a buyer for Stark and Company, endeavored to assume a serious and important air at times.

He was an undersized and stocky man who did not seem to know how to dress very well or could not afford it. In contrast to his nephew's almost immaculate garb, his own suit was far from perfect-fitting. It was unpressed and slightly soiled. And his tie the same. He had a habit of rubbing his hands in a clerkly fashion, of wrinkling his brows and scratching the back of his head at times, as though something he was about to say had cost him great thought and was of the utmost importance. Whereas, nothing that he uttered, as even Clyde could see, was of the slightest importance.

And so, too, with the stout and large Mrs. Wilson, who stood beside him while he was attempting to rise to the importance of Clyde. She merely beamed a fatty beam. She was almost ponderous, and pink, with a tendency to a double chin. She smiled and smiled, largely because she was naturally genial and on her good behavior here, but incidentally because Clyde was who he was. For as Clyde himself could see, Walter Dillard had lost no time in impressing his relatives with the fact that he was a Griffiths. Also that he had encountered and made a friend of him and that he was now chaperoning him locally.

"Walter has been telling us that you have just come on here to work for your uncle. You're at Mrs. Cuppy's now, I understand. I don't know her but I've always heard she keeps such a nice, refined place. Mr. Parsley, who lives here with her, used to go to school with me. But I don't see much of him any more. Did you meet him yet?"

"No, I didn't," said Clyde in return.

"Well, you know, we expected you last Sunday to dinner, only Walter had to go home. But you must come soon. Any time at all. I would love to have you." She beamed and her small grayish brown eyes twinkled.

Clyde could see that because of the fame of his uncle he was looked upon as a social find, really. And so it was with the remainder of this company, old and young—the Rev. Peter Isreals and his wife; Mr. Micah Bumpus, a local vendor of

printing inks, and his wife and son; Mr. and Mrs. Maximilian Pick, Mr. Pick being a wholesale and retail dealer in hay, grain and feed; Mr. Witness, a florist, and Mrs. Throop, a local real estate dealer. All knew Samuel Griffiths and his family by reputation and it seemed not a little interesting and strange to all of them that Clyde, a real nephew of so rich a man, should be here in their midst. The only trouble with this was that Clyde's manner was very soft and not as impressive as it should be—not so aggressive and contemptuous. And most of them were of that type of mind that respects insolence even where it pretends to condemn it.

In so far as the young girls were concerned, it was even more noticeable. For Dillard was making this important relationship of Clyde's perfectly plain to every one. "This is Clyde Griffiths, the nephew of Samuel Griffiths, Mr. Gilbert Griffiths' cousin, you know. He's just come on here to study the collar business in his uncle's factory." And Clyde, who realized how shallow was this pretense, was still not a little pleased and impressed by the effect of it all. This Dillard's effrontery. The brassy way in which, because of Clyde, he presumed to patronize these people. On this occasion, he kept guiding Clyde here and there, refusing for the most part to leave him alone for an instant. In fact he was determined that all whom he knew and liked among these girls and young men should know who and what Clyde was and that he was presenting him. Also that those whom he did not like should see as little of him as possible—not be introduced at all. "She don't amount to anything. Her father only keeps a small garage here. I wouldn't bother with her if I were you." Or, "He isn't much around here. Just a clerk in our store." At the same time, in regard to some others, he was all smiles and compliments, or at worst apologetic for their social lacks.

And then he was introduced to Zella Shuman and Rita Dickerman, who, for reasons of their own, not the least among which was a desire to appear a little wise and more sophisticated than the others here, came a little late. And it was true, as Clyde was to find out soon afterwards, that they were different, too—less simple and restricted than quite all of the girls whom Dillard had thus far introduced him to. They were not as sound religiously and morally as were these others. And as even Clyde noted on meeting them, they were as keen for as close an approach to pagan pleasure without admitting it to themselves, as it was possible to be and not be marked for what they were. And in consequence, there was something in their manner, the very spirit of the introduction, which struck him as different from the

tone of the rest of this church group—not exactly morally or religiously unhealthy but rather much freer, less repressed, less reserved than were these others.

"Oh, so you're Mr. Clyde Griffiths," observed Zella Shuman. "My, you look a lot like your cousin, don't you? I see him driving down Central Avenue ever so often. Walter has been telling us all about you. Do you like Lycurgus?"

The way she said "Walter," together with something intimate and possessive in the tone of her voice, caused Clyde to feel at once that she must feel rather closer to and freer with Dillard than he himself had indicated. A small scarlet bow of velvet ribbon at her throat, two small garnet earrings in her ears, a very trim and tight-fitting black dress, with a heavily flounced skirt, seemed to indicate that she was not opposed to showing her figure, and prized it, a mood which except for a demure and rather retiring poise which she affected, would most certainly have excited comment in such a place as this.

Rita Dickerman, on the other hand, was lush and blonde, with pink cheeks, light chestnut hair, and bluish gray eyes. Lacking the aggressive smartness that characterized Zella Shuman, she still radiated a certain something which to Clyde seemed to harmonize with the liberal if secret mood of her friend. Her manner, as Clyde could see, while much less suggestive of masked bravado was yielding and to him designedly so, as well as naturally provocative. It had been arranged that she was to intrigue him. Very much fascinated by Zella Shuman and in tow of her, they were inseparable. And when Clyde was introduced to her, she beamed upon him in a melting and sensuous way which troubled him not a little. For here in Lycurgus, as he was telling himself at the time, he must be very careful with whom he became familiar. And yet, unfortunately, as in the case of Hortense Briggs, she evoked thoughts of intimacy, however unproblematic or distant, which troubled him. But he must be careful. It was just such a free attitude as this suggested by Dillard as well as these girls' manners that had gotten him into trouble before.

"Now we'll just have a little ice cream and cake," suggested Dillard, after the few preliminary remarks were over, "and then we can get out of here. You two had better go around together and hand out a few hellos. Then we can meet at the ice cream booth. After that, if you say so, we'll leave, eh? What do you say?"

He looked at Zella Shuman as much as to say: "You know what is the best thing to do," and she smiled and replied:

"That's right. We can't leave right away. I see my cousin Mary over there. And Mother. And Fred Bruckner. Rita and I'll just go around by ourselves for a while and then we'll meet you, see." And Rita Dickerman forthwith bestowed upon Clyde an intimate and possessive smile.

After about twenty minutes of drifting and browsing, Dillard received some signal from Zella, and he and Clyde paused near the ice cream booth with its chairs in the center of the room. In a few moments they were casually joined by Zella and Rita, with whom they had some ice cream and cake. And then, being free of all obligations and as some of the others were beginning to depart, Dillard observed: "Let's beat it. We can go over to your place, can't we?"

"Sure, sure," whispered Zella, and together they made their way to the coat room. Clyde was still so dubious as to the wisdom of all this that he was inclined to be a little silent. He did not know whether he was fascinated by Rita or not. But once out in the street out of view of the church and the homing amusement seekers, he and Rita found themselves together, Zella and Dillard having walked on ahead. And although Clyde had taken her arm, as he thought fit, she maneuvered it free and laid a warm and caressing hand on his elbow. And she nudged quite close to him, shoulder to shoulder, and half leaning on him, began pattering of the life of Lycurgus.

There was something very furry and caressing about her voice now. Clyde liked it. There was something heavy and languorous about her body, a kind of ray or electron that intrigued and lured him in spite of himself. He felt that he would like to caress her arm and might if he wished—that he might even put his arm around her waist, and so soon. Yet here he was, a Griffiths, he was shrewd enough to think—a Lycurgus Griffiths—and that was what now made a difference—that made all those girls at this church social seem so much more interested in him and so friendly. Yet in spite of this thought, he did squeeze her arm ever so slightly and without reproach or comment from her.

And once in the Shuman home, which was a large old-fashioned square frame house with a square cupola, very retired among some trees and a lawn, they made themselves at home in a general living room which was much more handsomely furnished than any home with which Clyde had been identified heretofore. Dillard at once began sorting the records, with which he seemed most familiar, and to pull two rather large rugs out of the way, revealing a smooth, hardwood floor.

"There's one thing about this house and these trees and these

soft-toned needles," he commented for Clyde's benefit, of course, since he was still under the impression that Clyde might be and probably was a very shrewd person who was watching his every move here. "You can't hear a note of this victrola out in the street, can you, Zell? Nor upstairs, either, really, not with the soft needles. We've played it down here and danced to it several times, until three and four in the morning and they didn't even know it upstairs, did they, Zell?"

"That's right. But then Father's a little hard of hearing. And Mother don't hear anything, either, when she gets in her room and gets to reading. But it is hard to hear at that."

"Why, do people object so to dancing here?" asked Clyde.

"Oh, they don't—not the factory people—not at all," put in Dillard, "but most of the church people do. My uncle and aunt do. And nearly everyone else we met at the church to-night. except Zell and Rita." He gave them a most approving and encouraging glance. "And they're too broadminded to let a little thing like that bother them. Ain't that right, Zell?"

This young girl, who was very much fascinated by him, laughed and nodded, "You bet, that's right. I can't see any harm in it."

"Nor me, either," put in Rita, "nor my father and mother. Only they don't like to say anything about it or make me feel that they want me to do too much of it."

Dillard by then had started a piece entitled "Brown Eyes" and immediately Clyde and Rita and Dillard and Zella began to dance, and Clyde found himself insensibly drifting into a kind of intimacy with this girl which boded he could scarcely say what. She danced so warmly and enthusiastically—a kind of weaving and swaying motion which suggested all sorts of repressed enthusiasms. And her lips were at once wreathed with a kind of lyric smile which suggested a kind of hunger for this thing. And she was very pretty, more so dancing and smiling than at any other time.

"She is delicious," thought Clyde, "even if she is a little soft. Any fellow would do almost as well as me, but she likes me because she thinks I'm somebody." And almost at the same moment she observed: "Isn't it just too gorgeous? And you're such a good dancer, Mr. Griffiths."

"Oh, no," he replied, smiling into her eyes, "you're the one that's the dancer. I can dance because you're dancing with me."

He could feel now that her arms were large and soft, her bosom full for one so young. Exhilarated by dancing, she was quite intoxicating, her gestures almost provoking.

"Now we'll put on 'The Love Boat,'" called Dillard the moment "Brown Eyes" was ended, "and you and Zella can dance together and Rita and I will have a spin, eh, Rita?"

He was so fascinated by his own skill as a dancer, however, as well as his natural joy in the art, that he could scarcely wait to begin another, but must take Rita by the arms before putting on another record, gliding here and there, doing steps and executing figures which Clyde could not possibly achieve and which at once established Dillard as the superior dancer. Then, having done so, he called to Clyde to put on "The Love Boat."

But as Clyde could see, after dancing with Zella once, this was planned to be a happy companionship of two mutually mated couples who would not interfere with each other in any way, but rather would aid each other in their various schemes to enjoy one another's society. For while Zella danced with Clyde, and danced well and talked to him much, all the while he could feel that she was interested in Dillard and Dillard only and would prefer to be with him. For, after a few dances, and while he and Rita lounged on a settee and talked, Zella and Dillard left the room to go to the kitchen for a drink. Only, as Clyde observed, they stayed much longer than any single drink would have required.

And similarly, during this interval, it seemed as though it was intended even, by Rita, that he and she should draw closer to one another. For, finding the conversation on the settee lagging for a moment, she got up and apropos of nothing—no music and no words—motioned to him to dance some more with her. She had danced certain steps with Dillard which she pretended to show Clyde. But because of their nature, these brought her and Clyde into closer contact than before—very much so. And standing so close together and showing Clyde by elbow and arm how to do, her face and cheek came very close to him—too much for his own strength of will and purpose. He pressed his cheek to hers and she turned smiling and encouraging eyes upon him. On the instant, his self-possession was gone and he kissed her lips. And then again—and again. And instead of withdrawing them, as he thought she might, she let him—remained just as she was in order that he might kiss her more.

And suddenly now, as he felt this yielding of her warm body so close to him, and the pressure of her lips in response to his own, he realized that he had let himself in for a relationship which might not be so very easy to modify or escape. Also that it would be a very difficult thing for him to resist, since he now liked her and obviously she liked him.

CHAPTER IX

APART from the momentary thrill and zest of this, the effect was to throw Clyde, as before, speculatively back upon the problem of his proper course here. For here was this girl, and she was approaching him in this direct and suggestive way. And so soon after telling himself and his mother that his course was to be so different here—no such approaches or relationships as had brought on his downfall in Kansas City. And yet—and yet——

He was sorely tempted now, for in his contact with Rita he had the feeling that she was expecting him to suggest a further step—and soon. But just how and where? Not in connection with this large, strange house. There were other rooms apart from the kitchen to which Dillard and Zella had ostensibly departed. But even so, such a relationship once established! What then? Would he not be expected to continue it, or let himself in for possible complications in case he did not? He danced with and fondled her in a daring and aggressive fashion, yet thinking as he did so, "But this is not what I should be doing either, is it? This is Lycurgus. I am a Griffiths, here. I know how these people feel toward me—their parents even. Do I really care for her? Is there not something about her quick and easy availability which, if not exactly dangerous in so far as my future here is concerned, is not quite satisfactory,—too quickly intimate?" He was experiencing a sensation not unrelated to his mood in connection with the lupanar in Kansas City—attracted and yet repulsed. He could do no more than kiss and fondle her here in a somewhat restrained way until at last Dillard and Zella returned, whereupon the same degree of intimacy was no longer possible.

A clock somewhere striking two, it suddenly occurred to Rita that she must be going—her parents would object to her staying out so late. And since Dillard gave no evidence of deserting Zella, it followed, of course, that Clyde was to see her home, a pleasure that now had been allayed by a vague suggestion of disappointment or failure on the part of both. He had not risen to her expectations, he thought. Obviously he lacked the

courage yet to follow up the proffer of her favors, was the way she explained it to herself.

At her own door, not so far distant, and after a conversation which was still tinctured with intimations of some future occasions which might prove more favorable,—her attitude was decidedly encouraging, even here. They parted, but with Clyde still saying to himself that this new relationship was developing much too swiftly. He was not sure that he should undertake a relationship such as this here—so soon, anyhow. Where now were all his fine decisions made before coming here? What was he going to decide? And yet because of the sensual warmth and magnetism of Rita, he was irritated by his resolution and his inability to proceed as he otherwise might.

Two things which eventually decided him in regard to this came quite close together. One related to the attitude of the Griffiths themselves, which, apart from that of Gilbert, was not one of opposition or complete indifference, so much as it was a failure on the part of Samuel Griffiths in the first instance and the others largely because of him to grasp the rather anomalous, if not exactly lonely position in which Clyde would find himself here unless the family chose to show him at least some little courtesy or advise him cordially from time to time. Yet Samuel Griffiths, being always very much pressed for time, had scarcely given Clyde a thought during the first month, at least. He was here, properly placed, as he heard, would be properly looked after in the future,—what more, just now, at least?

And so for all of five weeks before any action of any kind was taken, and with Gilbert Griffiths comforted thereby, Clyde was allowed to drift along in his basement world wondering what was being intended in connection with himself. The attitude of others, including Dillard and these girls, finally made his position here seem strange.

However, about a month after Clyde had arrived, and principally because Gilbert seemed so content to say nothing regarding him, the elder Griffiths inquired one day:

"Well, what about your cousin? How's he doing by now?" And Gilbert, only a little worried as to what this might bode, replied, "Oh, he's all right. I started him off in the shrinking room. Is that all right?"

"Yes, I think so. That's as good a place as any for him to begin, I believe. But what do you think of him by now?"

"Oh," answered Gilbert very conservatively and decidedly independently—a trait for which his father had always admired him—"Not so much. He's all right, I guess. He may

work out. But he doesn't strike me as a fellow who would ever make much of a stir in this game. He hasn't had much of an education of any kind, you know. Any one can see that. Besides, he's not so very aggressive or energetic-looking. Too soft, I think. Still I don't want to knock him. He may be all right. You like him and I may be wrong. But I can't help but think that his real idea in coming here is that you'll do more for him than you would for someone else, just because he is related to you."

"Oh, you think he does. Well, if he does, he's wrong." But at the same time, he added, and that with a bantering smile: "He may not be as impractical as you think, though. He hasn't been here long enough for us to really tell, has he? He didn't strike me that way in Chicago. Besides there are a lot of little corners into which he might fit, aren't there, without any great waste, even if he isn't the most talented fellow in the world? If he's content to take a small job in life, that's his business. I can't prevent that. But at any rate, I don't want him sent away yet, anyhow, and I don't want him put on piece work. It wouldn't look right. After all, he is related to us. Just let him drift along for a little while and see what he does for himself."

"All right, governor," replied his son, who was hoping that his father would absent-mindedly let him stay where he was—in the lowest of all the positions the factory had to offer.

But, now, and to his dissatisfaction, Samuel Griffiths proceeded to add, "We'll have to have him out to the house for dinner pretty soon, won't we? I have thought of that but I haven't been able to attend to it before. I should have spoken to Mother about it before this. He hasn't been out yet, has he?"

"No, sir, not that I know of," replied Gilbert dourly. He did not like this at all, but was too tactful to show his opposition just here. "We've been waiting for you to say something about it, I suppose."

"Very well," went on Samuel, "you'd better find out where he's stopping and have him out. Next Sunday wouldn't be a bad time, if we haven't anything else on." Noting a flicker of doubt or disapproval in his son's eyes, he added: "After all, Gil, he's my nephew and your cousin, and we can't afford to ignore him entirely. That wouldn't be right, you know, either. You'd better speak to your mother to-night, or I will, and arrange it." He closed the drawer of a desk in which he had been looking for certain papers, got up and took down his hat and coat and left the office.

In consequence of this discussion, an invitation was sent to Clyde for the following Sunday at six-thirty to appear and participate in a Griffiths family meal. On Sunday at one-thirty was served the important family dinner to which usually was invited one or another of the various local or visiting friends of the family. At six-thirty nearly all of these guests had departed, and sometimes one or two of the Griffiths themselves, the cold collation served being partaken of by Mr. and Mrs. Griffiths and Myra—Bella and Gilbert usually having appointments elsewhere.

On this occasion, however, as Mrs. Griffiths and Myra and Bella decided in conference, they would all be present with the exception of Gilbert, who, because of his opposition as well as another appointment, explained that he would stop in for only a moment before leaving. Thus Clyde as Gilbert was pleased to note would be received and entertained without the likelihood of contacts, introductions and explanations to such of their more important connections who might chance to stop in during the afternoon. They would also have an opportunity to study him for themselves and see what they really did think without committing themselves in any way.

But in the meantime in connection with Dillard, Rita and Zella there had been a development which, because of the problem it had posed, was to be affected by this very decision on the part of the Griffiths. For following the evening at the Shuman home, and because, in spite of Clyde's hesitation at the time, all three including Rita herself, were still convinced that he must or would be smitten with her charms, there had been various hints, as well as finally a direct invitation or proposition on the part of Dillard to the effect that because of the camaraderie which had been established between himself and Clyde and these two girls, they make a week-end trip somewhere—preferably to Utica or Albany. The girls would go, of course. He could fix that through Zella with Rita for Clyde if he had any doubts or fears as to whether it could be negotiated or not. "You know she likes you. Zell was telling me the other day that she said she thought you were the candy. Some ladies' man, eh?" And he nudged Clyde genially and intimately,—a proceeding in this newer and grander world in which he now found himself,—and considering who he was here, was not as appealing to Clyde as it otherwise might have been. These fellows who were so pushing where they thought a fellow amounted to something more than they did! He could tell.

At the same time, the proposition he was now offering—as

thrilling and intriguing as it might be from one point of view—was likely to cause him endless trouble—was it not? In the first place he had no money—only fifteen dollars a week here so far—and if he was going to be expected to indulge in such expensive outings as these, why, of course, he could not manage. Carfare, meals, a hotel bill, maybe an automobile ride for two. And after that he would be in close contact with this Rita whom he scarcely knew. And might she not take it on herself to become intimate here in Lycurgus, maybe—expect him to call on her regularly—and go places—and then—well, gee—supposing the Griffiths—his cousin Gilbert, heard of or saw this. Hadn't Zella said that she saw him often on the street here and there in Lycurgus? And wouldn't they be likely to encounter him somewhere—sometime—when they were all together? And wouldn't that fix him as being intimate with just another store clerk like Dillard who didn't amount to so much after all? It might even mean the end of his career here! Who could tell what it might lead to?

He coughed and made various excuses. Just now he had a lot of work to do. Besides—a venture like that—he would have to see first. His relatives, you know. Besides next Sunday and the Sunday after, some extra work in connection with the factory was going to hold him in Lycurgus. After that time he would see. Actually, in his wavering way—and various disturbing thoughts as to Rita's charm returning to him at moments, he was wondering if it was not desirable—his other decision to the contrary notwithstanding, to skimp himself as much as possible over two or three weeks and so go anyhow. He had been saving something toward a new dress suit and collapsible silk hat. Might he not use some of that—even though he knew the plan to be all wrong?

The fair, plump, sensuous Rita!

But then, not at that very moment—but in the interim following, the invitation from the Griffiths. Returning from his work one evening very tired and still cogitating this gay adventure proposed by Dillard, he found lying on the table in his room a note written on very heavy and handsome paper which had been delivered by one of the servants of the Griffiths in his absence. It was all the more arresting to him because on the flap of the envelope was embossed in high relief the initials "E. G." He at once tore it open and eagerly read:

"My Dear Nephew:

"Since your arrival my husband has been away most of the time, and although we have wished to have you with us before, we have

thought it best to await his leisure. He is freer now and we will be very glad if you can find it convenient to come to supper with us at six o'clock next Sunday. We dine very informally—just ourselves—so in case you can or cannot come, you need not bother to write or telephone. And you need not dress for this occasion either. But come if you can. We will be happy to see you.

"Sincerely, your aunt,

"ELIZABETH GRIFFITHS."

On reading this Clyde, who, during all this silence and the prosecution of a task in the shrinking room which was so eminently distasteful to him, was being more and more weighed upon by the thought that possibly, after all, this quest of his was going to prove a vain one and that he was going to be excluded from any real contact with his great relatives, was most romantically and hence impractically heartened. For only see—here was this grandiose letter with its "very happy to see you," which seemed to indicate that perhaps, after all, they did not think so badly of him. Mr. Samuel Griffiths had been away all the time. That was it. Now he would get to see his aunt and cousins and the inside of that great house. It must be very wonderful. They might even take him up after this—who could tell? But how remarkable that he should be taken up now, just when he had about decided that they would not.

And forthwith his interest in, as well as his weakness for, Rita, if not Zella and Dillard began to evaporate. What! Mix with people so far below him—a Griffiths—in the social scale here and at the cost of endangering his connection with that important family. Never! It was a great mistake. Didn't this letter coming just at this time prove it? And fortunately—(how fortunately!)—he had had the good sense not to let himself in for anything as yet. And so now, without much trouble, and because, most likely from now on it would prove necessary for him so to do he could gradually eliminate himself from this contact with Dillard—move away from Mrs. Cuppy's—if necessary, or say that his uncle had cautioned him—anything, but not go with this crowd any more, just the same. It wouldn't do. It would endanger his prospects in connection with this new development. And instead of troubling over Rita and Utica now, he began to formulate for himself once more the essential nature of the private life of the Griffiths, the fascinating places they must go, the interesting people with whom they must be in contact. And at once he began to think of the need of a dress suit, or at least a tuxedo and trousers. Accordingly the next morning, he gained permission from Mr. Kemerer to leave at eleven and not return before one, and in that time he managed to find coat,

trousers and a pair of patent leather shoes, as well as a white silk muffler for the money he had already saved. And so arrayed he felt himself safe. He must make a good impression.

And for the entire time between then and Sunday evening, instead of thinking of Rita or Dillard or Zella any more, he was thinking of this opportunity. Plainly it was an event to be admitted to the presence of such magnificence.

The only drawback to all this, as he well sensed now, was this same Gilbert Griffiths, who surveyed him always whenever he met him anywhere with such hard, cold eyes. He might be there, and then he would probably assume that superior attitude, to make him feel his inferior position, if he could—and Clyde had the weakness at times of admitting to himself that he could. And no doubt, if he (Clyde) sought to carry himself with too much of an air in the presence of this family, Gilbert most likely would seek to take it out of him in some way later in connection with the work in the factory. He might see to it, for instance, that his father heard only unfavorable things about him. And, of course, if he were retained in this wretched shrinking room, and given no show of any kind, how could he expect to get anywhere or be anybody? It was just his luck that on arriving here he should find this same Gilbert looking almost like him and being so opposed to him for obviously no reason at all.

However, despite all his doubts, he decided to make the best of this opportunity, and accordingly on Sunday evening at six set out for the Griffiths' residence, his nerves decidedly taut because of the ordeal before him. And when he reached the main gate, a large, arched wrought iron affair which gave in on a wide, winding, brick walk which led to the front entrance, he lifted the heavy latch which held the large iron gates in place, with almost a quaking sense of adventure. And as he approached along the walk, he felt as though he might well be the object of observant and critical eyes. Perhaps Mr. Samuel or Mr. Gilbert Griffiths or one or the other of the two sisters was looking at him now from one of those heavily curtained windows. On the lower floor several lights glowed with a soft and inviting radiance.

This mood, however, was brief. For soon the door was opened by a servant who took his coat and invited him into the very large living room, which was very impressive. To Clyde, even after the Green-Davidson and the Union League, it seemed a very beautiful room. It contained so many handsome pieces of furniture and such rich rugs and hangings. A fire burned in the

large, high fireplace before which was circled a number of divans and chairs. There were lamps, a tall clock, a great table. No one was in the room at the moment, but presently as Clyde fidgeted and looked about he heard a rustling of silk to the rear, where a great staircase descended from the rooms above. And from there he saw Mrs. Griffiths approaching him, a bland and angular and faded-looking woman. But her walk was brisk, her manner courteous, if non-committal, as was her custom always, and after a few moments of conversation he found himself peaceful and fairly comfortable in her presence.

"My nephew, I believe," she smiled.

"Yes," replied Clyde simply, and because of his nervousness, with unusual dignity. "I am Clyde Griffiths."

"I'm very glad to see you and to welcome you to our home," began Mrs. Griffiths with a certain amount of aplomb which years of contact with the local high world had given her at last. "And my children will be, too, of course. Bella is not here just now or Gilbert, either, but then they will be soon, I believe. My husband is resting, but I heard him stirring just now, and he'll be down in a moment. Won't you sit here?" She motioned to a large divan between them. "We dine nearly always alone here together on Sunday evening, so I thought it would be nice if you came just to be alone with us. How do you like Lycurgus now?"

She arranged herself on one of the large divans before the fire and Clyde rather awkwardly seated himself at a respectful distance from her.

"Oh, I like it very much," he observed, exerting himself to be congenial and to smile. "Of course I haven't seen so very much of it yet, but what I have I like. This street is one of the nicest I have ever seen anywhere," he added enthusiastically. "The houses are so large and the grounds so beautiful."

"Yes, we here in Lycurgus pride ourselves on Wykeagy Avenue," smiled Mrs. Griffiths, who took no end of satisfaction in the grace and rank of her own home in this street. She and her husband had been so long climbing up to it. "Every one who sees it seems to feel the same way about it. It was laid out many years ago when Lycurgus was just a village. It is only within the last fifteen years that it has come to be as handsome as it is now.

"But you must tell me something about your mother and father. I never met either of them, you know, though, of course, I have heard my husband speak of them often—that is, of his

brother, anyhow," she corrected. "I don't believe he ever met your mother. How is your father?"

"Oh, he's quite well," replied Clyde, simply. "And Mother, too. They're living in Denver now. We did live for a while in Kansas City, but for the last three years they've been out there. I had a letter from Mother only the other day. She says everything is all right."

"Then you keep up a correspondence with her, do you? That's nice." She smiled, for by now she had become interested by and, on the whole, rather taken with Clyde's appearance. He looked so neat and generally presentable, so much like her own son that she was a little startled at first and intrigued on that score. If anything, Clyde was taller, better built and hence better looking, only she would never have been willing to admit that. For to her Gilbert, although he was intolerant and contemptuous even to her at times, simulating an affection which was as much a custom as a reality, was still a dynamic and aggressive person putting himself and his conclusions before everyone else. Whereas Clyde was more soft and vague and fumbling. Her son's force must be due to the innate ability of her husband as well as the strain of some relatives in her own line who had not been unlike Gilbert, while Clyde probably drew his lesser force from the personal unimportance of his parents.

But having settled this problem in her son's favor, Mrs. Griffiths was about to ask after his sisters and brothers, when they were interrupted by Samuel Griffiths who now approached. Measuring Clyde, who had risen, very sharply once more, and finding him very satisfactory in appearance at least, he observed: "Well, so here you are, eh? They've placed you, I believe, without my ever seeing you."

"Yes, sir," replied Clyde, very deferentially and half bowing in the presence of so great a man.

"Well, that's all right. Sit down! Sit down! I'm very glad they did. I hear you're working down in the shrinking room at present. Not exactly a pleasant place, but not such a bad place to begin, either—at the bottom. The best people start there sometimes." He smiled and added: "I was out of the city when you came on or I would have seen you."

"Yes, sir," replied Clyde, who had not ventured to seat himself again until Mr. Griffiths had sunk into a very large stuffed chair near the divan. And the latter, now that he saw Clyde in an ordinary Tuxedo with a smart pleated shirt and black tie, as opposed to the club uniform in which he had last seen him in Chicago, was inclined to think him even more attrac-

tive than before—not quite as negligible and unimportant as his son Gilbert had made out. Still, not being dead to the need of force and energy in business and sensing that Clyde was undoubtedly lacking in these qualities, he did now wish that Clyde had more vigor and vim in him. It would reflect more handsomely on the Griffiths end of the family and please his son more, maybe.

"Like it where you are now?" he observed condescendingly.

"Well, yes, sir, that is, I wouldn't say that I like it exactly," replied Clyde quite honestly. "But I don't mind it. It's as good as any other way to begin, I suppose." The thought in his mind at the moment was that he would like to impress on his uncle that he was cut out for something better. And the fact that his cousin Gilbert was not present at the moment gave him the courage to say it.

"Well, that's the proper spirit," commented Samuel Griffiths, pleased. "It isn't the most pleasant part of the process, I will admit, but it's one of the most essential things to know, to begin with. And it takes a little time, of course, to get anywhere in any business these days."

From this Clyde wondered how long he was to be left in that dim world below stairs.

But while he was thinking this Myra came forward, curious about him and what he would be like, and very pleased to see that he was not as uninteresting as Gilbert had painted him. There was something, as she now saw, about Clyde's eyes—nervous and somewhat furtive and appealing or seeking—that at once interested her, and reminded her, perhaps, since she was not much of a success socially either, of something in herself.

"Your cousin, Clyde Griffiths, Myra," observed Samuel rather casually, as Clyde arose. "My daughter Myra," he added, to Clyde. "This is the young man I've been telling you about."

Clyde bowed and then took the cool and not very vital hand that Myra extended to him, but feeling it just the same to be more friendly and considerate than the welcome of the others.

"Well, I hope you'll like it, now that you're here," she began, genially. "We all like Lycurgus, only after Chicago I suppose it will not mean so very much to you." She smiled and Clyde, feeling very formal and stiff in the presence of all these very superior relatives, now returned a stiff "thank you," and was just about to seat himself when the outer door opened and Gilbert Griffiths strode in. The whirring of a motor had preceded this—a motor that had stopped outside the large east side

entrance. "Just a minute, Dolge," he called to some one outside. "I won't be long." Then turning to the family, he added: "Excuse me, folks, I'll be back in a minute." He dashed up the rear stairs, only to return after a time and confront Clyde, if not the others, with that same rather icy and inconsiderate air that had so far troubled him at the factory. He was wearing a light, belted motoring coat of a very pronounced stripe, and a dark leather cap and gauntlets which gave him almost a military air. After nodding to Clyde rather stiffly, and adding, "How do you do," he laid a patronizing hand on his father's shoulder and observed: "Hi, Dad. Hello, Mother. Sorry I can't be with you to-night. But I just came over from Amsterdam with Dolge and Eustis to get Constance and Jacqueline. There's some doings over at the Bridgeman's. But I'll be back again before morning. Or at the office, anyhow. Everything all right with you, Mr. Griffiths?" he observed to his father.

"Yes, I have nothing to complain of," returned his father. "But it seems to me you're making a pretty long night of it, aren't you?"

"Oh, I don't mean that," returned his son, ignoring Clyde entirely. "I just mean that if I can't get back by two, I'll stay over, that's all, see." He tapped his father genially on the shoulder again.

"I hope you're not driving that car as fast as usual," complained his mother. "It's not safe at all."

"Fifteen miles an hour, Mother. Fifteen miles an hour. I know the rules." He smiled loftily.

Clyde did not fail to notice the tone of condescension and authority that went with all this. Plainly here, as at the factory, he was a person who had to be reckoned with. Apart from his father, perhaps, there was no one here to whom he offered any reverence. What a superior attitude, thought Clyde!

How wonderful it must be to be a son who, without having had to earn all this, could still be so much, take oneself so seriously, exercise so much command and authority. It might be, as it plainly was, that this youth was very superior and indifferent in tone toward him. But think of being such a youth, having so much power at one's command!

CHAPTER X

AT this point a maid announced that supper was served and instantly Gilbert took his departure. At the same time the family arose and Mrs. Griffiths asked the maid: "Has Bella telephoned yet?"

"No, ma'am," replied the servant, "not yet."

"Well, have Mrs. Truesdale call up the Finchleys and see if she's there. You tell her I said that she is to come home at once."

The maid departed for a moment while the group proceeded to the dining room, which lay to the west of the stairs at the rear. Again, as Clyde saw, this was another splendidly furnished room done in a very light brown, with a long center table of carved walnut, evidently used only for special occasions. It was surrounded by high-backed chairs and lighted by candelabras set at even spaces upon it. In a lower ceilinged and yet ample circular alcove beyond this, looking out on the garden to the south, was a smaller table set for six. It was in this alcove that they were to dine, a different thing from what Clyde had expected for some reason.

Seated in a very placid fashion, he found himself answering questions principally as to his own family, the nature of its life, past and present; how old was his father now? His mother? What had been the places of their residence before moving to Denver? How many brothers and sisters had he? How old was his older sister, Esta? What did she do? And the others? Did his father like managing a hotel? What had been the nature of his father's work in Kansas City? How long had the family lived there?

Clyde was not a little troubled and embarrassed by this chain of questions which flowed rather heavily and solemnly from Samuel Griffiths or his wife. And from Clyde's hesitating replies, especially in regard to the nature of the family life in Kansas City, both gathered that he was embarrassed and troubled by some of the questions. They laid it to the extreme poverty of their relatives, of course. For having asked, "I suppose you began your hotel work in Kansas City, didn't you, after you left school?" Clyde blushed deeply, bethinking himself

of the incident of the stolen car and of how little real schooling he had had. Most certainly he did not like the thought of having himself identified with hotel life in Kansas City, and more especially the Green-Davidson.

But fortunately at this moment, the door opened and Bella entered, accompanied by two girls such as Clyde would have assumed at once belonged to this world. How different to Rita and Zella with whom his thought so recently had been disturbedly concerned. He did not know Bella, of course, until she proceeded most familiarly to address her family. But the others—one was Sondra Finchley, so frequently referred to by Bella and her mother—as smart and vain and sweet a girl as Clyde had ever laid his eyes upon—so different to any he had ever known and so superior. She was dressed in a close-fitting tailored suit which followed her form exactly and which was enhanced by a small dark leather hat, pulled fetchingly low over her eyes. A leather belt of the same color encircled her neck. By a leather leash she led a French bull and over one arm carried a most striking coat of black and gray checks—not too pronounced and yet having the effect of a man's modish overcoat. To Clyde's eyes she was the most adorable feminine thing he had seen in all his days. Indeed her effect on him was electric—thrilling—arousing in him a curiously stinging sense of what it was to want and not to have—to wish to win and yet to feel, almost agonizingly, that he was destined not even to win a glance from her. It tortured and flustered him. At one moment he had a keen desire to close his eyes and shut her out—at another to look only at her constantly—so truly was he captivated.

Yet, whether she saw him or not, she gave no sign at first, exclaiming to her dog: "Now, Bissell, if you're not going to behave, I'm going to take you out and tie you out there. Oh, I don't believe I can stay a moment if he won't behave better than this." He had seen a family cat and was tugging to get near her.

Beside her was another girl whom Clyde did not fancy nearly so much, and yet who, after her fashion, was as smart as Sondra and perhaps as alluring to some. She was blonde—tow-headed—with clear almond-shaped, greenish-gray eyes, a small, graceful, catlike figure, and a slinky feline manner. At once, on entering, she sidled across the room to the end of the table where Mrs. Griffiths sat and leaning over her at once began to purr.

"Oh, how are you, Mrs. Griffiths? I'm so glad to see you again. It's been some time since I've been over here, hasn't it?

But then Mother and I have been away. She and Grant are over at Albany to-day. And I just picked up Bella and Sondra here at the Lamberts'. You're just having a quiet little supper by yourselves, aren't you? How are you, Myra?" she called, and reaching over Mrs. Griffiths' shoulder touched Myra quite casually on the arm, as though it were more a matter of form than anything else.

In the meantime Bella, who next to Sondra seemed to Clyde decidedly the most charming of the three, was exclaiming: "Oh, I'm late. Sorry, Mamma and Daddy. Won't that do this time?" Then noting Clyde, and as though for the first time, although he had risen as they entered and was still standing, she paused in semi-mock modesty as did the others. And Clyde, over-sensitive to just such airs and material distinctions, was fairly tremulous with a sense of his own inadequacy, as he waited to be introduced. For to him, youth and beauty in such a station as this represented the ultimate triumph of the female. His weakness for Hortense Briggs, to say nothing of Rita, who was not so attractive as either of these, illustrated the effect of trim femininity on him, regardless of merit.

"Bella," observed Samuel Griffiths, heavily, noting Clyde still standing, "your cousin, Clyde."

"Oh, yes," replied Bella, observing that Clyde looked exceedingly like Gilbert. "How are you? Mother has been saying that you were coming to call one of these days." She extended a finger or two, then turned toward her friends. "My friends, Miss Finchley and Miss Cranston, Mr. Griffiths."

The two girls bowed, each in the most stiff and formal manner, at the same time studying Clyde most carefully and rather directly, "Well, he does look like Gil a lot, doesn't he?" whispered Sondra to Bertine, who had drawn near to her. And Bertine replied: "I never saw anything like it. He's really better-looking, isn't he—a lot?"

Sondra nodded, pleased to note in the first instance that he was somewhat better-looking than Bella's brother, whom she did not like—next that he was obviously stricken with her, which was her due, as she invariably decided in connection with youths thus smitten with her. But having thus decided, and seeing that his glance was persistently and helplessly drawn to her, she concluded that she need pay no more attention to him, for the present anyway. He was too easy.

But now Mrs. Griffiths, who had not anticipated this visitation and was a little irritated with Bella for introducing her friends at this time since it at once raised the question of Clyde's

social position here, observed: "Hadn't you two better lay off your coats and sit down? I'll just have Nadine lay extra plates at this end. Bella, you can sit next to your father."

"Oh, no, not at all," and "No, indeed, we're just on our way home ourselves. I can't stay a minute," came from Sondra and Bertine. But now that they were here and Clyde had proved to be as attractive as he was, they were perversely interested to see what, if any, social flare there was to him. Gilbert Griffiths, as both knew, was far from being popular in some quarters—their own in particular, however much they might like Bella. He was, for two such self-centered beauties as these, too aggressive, self-willed and contemptuous at times. Whereas Clyde, if one were to judge by his looks, at least was much more malleable. And if it were to prove now that he was of equal station, or that the Griffiths thought so, decidedly he would be available locally, would he not? At any rate, it would be interesting to know whether he was rich. But this thought was almost instantly satisfied by Mrs. Griffiths, who observed rather definitely and intentionally to Bertine: "Mr. Griffiths is a nephew of ours from the West who has come on to see if he can make a place for himself in my husband's factory. He's a young man who has to make his own way in the world and my husband has been kind enough to give him an opportunity."

Clyde flushed, since obviously this was a notice to him that his social position here was decidedly below that of the Griffiths or these girls. At the same time, as he also noticed, the look of Bertine Cranston, who was only interested in youths of means and position, changed from one of curiosity to marked indifference. On the other hand, Sondra Finchley, by no means so practical as her friend, though of a superior station in her set, since she was so very attractive and her parents possessed of even more means—re-surveyed Clyde with one thought written rather plainly on her face, that it was too bad. He really was so attractive.

At the same time Samuel Griffiths, having a peculiar fondness for Sondra, if not Bertine, whom Mrs. Griffiths also disliked as being too tricky and sly, was calling to her: "Here, Sondra, tie up your dog to one of the dining-room chairs and come and sit by me. Throw your coat over that chair. Here's room for you." He motioned to her to come.

"But I can't, Uncle Samuel!" called Sondra, familiarly and showily and yet somehow sweetly, seeking to ingratiate herself by this affected relationship. "We're late now. Besides Bissell won't behave. Bertine and I are just on our way home, truly."

"Oh, yes, Papa," put in Bella, quickly, "Bertine's horse ran a nail in his foot yesterday and is going lame to-day. And neither Grant nor his father is home. She wants to know if you know anything that's good for it."

"Which foot is it?" inquired Griffiths, interested, while Clyde continued to survey Sondra as best he might. She was so delicious, he thought—her nose so tiny and tilted—her upper lip arched so roguishly upward toward her nose.

"It's the left fore. I was riding out on the East Kingston road yesterday afternoon. Jerry threw a shoe and must have picked up a splinter, but John doesn't seem to be able to find it."

"Did you ride him much with the nail, do you think?"

"About eight miles—all the way back."

"Well, you had better have John put on some liniment and a bandage and call a veterinary. He'll come around all right, I'm sure."

The group showed no signs of leaving and Clyde, left quite to himself for the moment, was thinking what an easy, delightful world this must be—this local society. For here they were without a care, apparently, between any of them. All their talk was of houses being built, horses they were riding, friends they had met, places they were going to, things they were going to do. And there was Gilbert, who had left only a little while before—motoring somewhere with a group of young men. And Bella, his cousin, trifling around with these girls in the beautiful homes of this street, while he was shunted away in a small third-floor room at Mrs. Cuppy's with no place to go. And with only fifteen dollars a week to live on. And in the morning he would be working in the basement again, while these girls were rising to more pleasure. And out in Denver were his parents with their small lodging house and mission, which he dared not even describe accurately here.

Suddenly the two girls declaring they must go, they took themselves off. And he and the Griffiths were once more left to themselves—he with the feeling that he was very much out of place and neglected here, since Samuel Griffiths and his wife and Bella, anyhow, if not Myra, seemed to be feeling that he was merely being permitted to look into a world to which he did not belong; also, that because of his poverty it would be impossible to fit him into—however much he might dream of associating with three such wonderful girls as these. And at once he felt sad—very—his eyes and his mood darkening so much that not only Samuel Griffiths, but his wife as well as

Myra noticed it. If he could enter upon this world, find some way. But of the group it was only Myra, not any of the others, who sensed that in all likelihood he was lonely and depressed. And in consequence as all were rising and returning to the large living room (Samuel chiding Bella for her habit of keeping her family waiting) it was Myra who drew near to Clyde to say: "I think after you've been here a little while you'll probably like Lycurgus better than you do now, even. There are quite a number of interesting places to go and see around here—lakes and the Adirondacks are just north of here, about seventy miles. And when the summer comes and we get settled at Greenwood, I'm sure Father and Mother will like you to come up there once in a while."

She was by no means sure that this was true, but under the circumstances, whether it was or not, she felt like saying it to Clyde. And thereafter, since he felt more comfortable with her, he talked with her as much as he could without neglecting either Bella or the family, until about half-past nine, when, suddenly feeling very much out of place and alone, he arose saying that he must go, that he had to get up early in the morning. And as he did so, Samuel Griffiths walked with him to the front door and let him out. But he, too, by now, as had Myra before him, feeling that Clyde was rather attractive and yet, for reasons of poverty, likely to be neglected from now on, not only by his family, but by himself as well, observed most pleasantly, and, as he hoped, compensatively: "It's rather nice out, isn't it? Wykeagy Avenue hasn't begun to show what it can do yet because the spring isn't quite here. But in a few weeks," and he looked up most inquiringly at the sky and sniffed the late April air, "we must have you out. All the trees and flowers will be in bloom then and you can see how really nice it is. Goodnight."

He smiled and put a very cordial note into his voice, and once more Clyde felt that, whatever Gilbert Griffiths' attitude might be, most certainly his father was not wholly indifferent to him.

CHAPTER XI

THE days lapsed and, although no further word came from the Griffiths, Clyde was still inclined to exaggerate the importance of this one contact and to dream from time to time of delightful meetings with those girls and how wonderful if a love affair with one of them might eventuate for him. The beauty of that world in which they moved. The luxury and charm as opposed to this of which he was a part. Dillard! Rita! Tush! They were really dead for him. He aspired to this other or nothing as he saw it now and proceeded to prove as distant to Dillard as possible, an attitude which by degrees tended to alienate that youth entirely for he saw in Clyde a snob which potentially he was if he could have but won to what he desired. However, as he began to see afterwards, time passed and he was left to work until, depressed by the routine, meager pay and commonplace shrinking-room contacts, he began to think not so much of returning to Rita or Dillard,—he could not quite think of them now with any satisfaction, but of giving up this venture here and returning to Chicago or going to New York, where he was sure that he could connect himself with some hotel if need be. But then, as if to revive his courage and confirm his earlier dreams, a thing happened which caused him to think that certainly he was beginning to rise in the estimation of the Griffiths—father and son—whether they troubled to entertain him socially or not. For it chanced that one Saturday in spring, Samuel Griffiths decided to make a complete tour of inspection of the factory with Joshua Whiggam at his elbow. Reaching the shrinking department about noon, he observed for the first time with some dismay, Clyde in his undershirt and trousers working at the feeding end of two of the shrinking racks, his nephew having by this time acquired the necessary skill to "feed" as well as "take." And recalling how very neat and generally presentable he had appeared at his house but a few weeks before, he was decidedly disturbed by the contrast. For one thing he had felt about Clyde, both in Chicago and here at his home, was that he had presented a neat and pleasing appearance. And he, almost as much as his son, was jealous, not only of the name, but the general social ap-

pearance of the Griffiths before the employees of this factory as well as the community at large. And the sight of Clyde here, looking so much like Gilbert and in an armless shirt and trousers working among these men, tended to impress upon him more sharply than at any time before the fact that Clyde was his nephew, and that he ought not to be compelled to continue at this very menial form of work any longer. To the other employees it might appear that he was unduly indifferent to the meaning of such a relationship.

Without, however, saying a word to Whiggam or anyone else at the time, he waited until his son returned on Monday morning, from a trip that he had taken out of town, when he called him into his office and observed: "I made a tour of the factory Saturday and found young Clyde still down in the shrinking room."

"What of it, Dad?" replied his son, curiously interested as to why his father should at this time wish to mention Clyde in this special way. "Other people before him have worked down there and it hasn't hurt them."

"All true enough, but they weren't nephews of mine. And they didn't look as much like you as he does"—a comment which irritated Gilbert greatly. "It won't do, I tell you. It doesn't look quite right to me, and I'm afraid it won't look right to other people here who see how much he looks like you and know that he is your cousin and my nephew. I didn't realize that at first, because I haven't been down there, but I don't think it wise to keep him down there any longer doing that kind of thing. It won't do. We'll have to make a change, switch him around somewhere else where he won't look like that."

His eyes darkened and his brow wrinkled. The impression that Clyde made in his old clothes and with beads of sweat standing out on his forehead had not been pleasant.

"But I'll tell you how it is, Dad," Gilbert persisted, anxious and determined because of his innate opposition to Clyde to keep him there if possible. "I'm not so sure that I can find just the right place for him now anywhere else—at least not without moving someone else who has been here a long time and worked hard to get there. He hasn't had any training in anything so far, but just what he's doing."

"Don't know or don't care anything about that," replied Griffiths senior, feeling that his son was a little jealous and in consequence disposed to be unfair to Clyde. "That's no place for him and I won't have him there any longer. He's been there long enough. And I can't afford to have the name of any of

this family come to mean anything but just what it does around here now—reserve and ability and energy and good judgment. It's not good for the business. And anything less than that is a liability. You get me, don't you?"

"Yes, I get you all right, governor."

"Well, then, do as I say. Get hold of Whiggam and figure out some other place for him around here, and not as piece worker or a hand either. It was a mistake to put him down there in the first place. There must be some little place in one of the departments where he can be fitted in as the head of something, first or second or third assistant to some one, and where he can wear a decent suit of clothes and look like somebody. And, if necessary, let him go home on full pay until you find something for him. But I want him changed. By the way, how much is he being paid now?"

"About fifteen, I think," replied Gilbert blandly.

"Not enough, if he's to make the right sort of an appearance here. Better make it twenty-five. It's more than he's worth, I know, but it can't be helped now. He has to have enough to live on while he's here, and from now on, I'd rather pay him that than have any one think we were not treating him right."

"All right, all right, governor. Please don't be cross about it, will you?" pleaded Gilbert, noting his father's irritation. "I'm not entirely to blame. You agreed to it in the first place when I suggested it, didn't you? But I guess you're right at that. Just leave it to me. I'll find a decent place for him," and turning, he proceeded in search of Whiggam, although at the same time thinking how he was to effect all this without permitting Clyde to get the notion that he was at all important here—to make him feel that this was being done as a favor to him and not for any reasons of merit in connection with himself.

And at once, Whiggam appearing, he, after a very diplomatic approach on the part of Gilbert, racked his brains, scratched his head, went away and returned after a time to say that the only thing he could think of, since Clyde was obviously lacking in technical training, was that of assistant to Mr. Liggett, who was foreman in charge of five big stitching rooms on the fifth floor, but who had under him one small and very special, though by no means technical, department which required the separate supervision of either an assistant forelady or man.

This was the stamping room—a separate chamber at the west end of the stitching floor, where were received daily from the cutting room above from seventy-five to one hundred thousand dozen unstitched collars of different brands and sizes. And

here they were stamped by a group of girls according to the slips or directions attached to them with the size and brand of the collar. The sole business of the assistant foreman in charge here, as Gilbert well knew, after maintaining due decorum and order, was to see that this stamping process went uninterruptedly forward. Also that after the seventy-five to one hundred thousand dozen collars were duly stamped and transmitted to the stitchers, who were just outside in the larger room, to see that they were duly credited in a book of entry. And that the number of dozens stamped by each girl was duly recorded in order that her pay should correspond with her services.

For this purpose a little desk and various entry books, according to size and brand, were kept here. Also the cutters' slips, as taken from the bundles by the stampers were eventually delivered to this assistant in lots of a dozen or more and filed on spindles. It was really nothing more than a small clerkship, at times in the past held by young men or girls or old men or middle-aged women, according to the exigencies of the life of the place.

The thing that Whiggam feared in connection with Clyde and which he was quick to point out to Gilbert on this occasion was that because of his inexperience and youth Clyde might not, at first, prove as urgent and insistent a master of this department as the work there required. There were nothing but young girls there—some of them quite attractive. Also was it wise to place a young man of Clyde's years and looks among so many girls? For, being susceptible, as he might well be at that age, he might prove too easy—not stern enough. The girls might take advantage of him. If so, it wouldn't be possible to keep him there very long. Still there was this temporary vacancy, and it was the only one in the whole factory at the moment. Why not, for the time being, send him upstairs for a tryout? It might not be long before either Mr. Liggett or himself would know of something else or whether or not he was suited for the work up there. In that case it would be easy to make a retransfer.

Accordingly, about three in the afternoon of this same Monday, Clyde was sent for and after being made to wait for some fifteen minutes, as was Gilbert's method, he was admitted to the austere presence.

"Well, how are you getting along down where you are now?" asked Gilbert coldly and inquisitorially. And Clyde, who invariably experienced a depression whenever he came anywhere near his cousin, replied, with a poorly forced smile, "Oh, just

about the same, Mr. Griffiths. I can't complain. I like it well enough. I'm learning a little something, I guess."

"You guess?"

"Well, I know I've learned a few things, of course," added Clyde, flushing slightly and feeling down deep within himself a keen resentment at the same time that he achieved a half-ingratiating and half-apologetic smile.

"Well, that's a little better. A man could hardly be down there as long as you've been and not know whether he had learned anything or not." Then deciding that he was being too severe, perhaps, he modified his tone slightly, and added: "But that's not why I sent for you. There's another matter I want to talk to you about. Tell me, did you ever have charge of any people or any other person than yourself, at any time in your life?"

"I don't believe I quite understand," replied Clyde, who, because he was a little nervous and flustered, had not quite registered the question accurately.

"I mean have you ever had any people work under you—been given a few people to direct in some department somewhere? Been a foreman or an assistant foreman in charge of anything?"

"No, sir, I never have," answered Clyde, but so nervous that he almost stuttered. For Gilbert's tone was very severe and cold—highly contemptuous. At the same time, now that the nature of the question was plain, its implication came to him. In spite of his cousin's severity, his ill manner toward him, still he could see his employers were thinking of making a foreman of him—putting him in charge of somebody—people. They must be! At once his ears and fingers began to titillate—the roots of his hair to tingle: "But I've seen how it's done in clubs and hotels," he added at once. "And I think I might manage if I were given a trial. " His cheeks were now highly colored—his eyes crystal clear.

"Not the same thing. Not the same thing," insisted Gilbert sharply. "Seeing and doing are two entirely different things. A person without any experience can think a lot, but when it comes to doing, he's not there. Anyhow, this is one business that requires people who do know."

He stared at Clyde critically and quizzically while Clyde, feeling that he must be wrong in his notion that something was going to be done for him, began to quiet himself. His cheeks resumed their normal pallor and the light died from his eyes.

"Yes, sir, I guess that's true, too," he commented.

"But you don't need to guess in this case," insisted Gilbert.

"You know. That's the trouble with people who don't know. They're always guessing."

The truth was that Gilbert was so irritated to think that he must now make a place for his cousin, and that despite his having done nothing at all to deserve it, that he could scarcely conceal the spleen that now colored his mood.

"You're right, I know," said Clyde placatingly, for he was still hoping for this hinted-at promotion.

"Well, the fact is," went on Gilbert, "I might have placed you in the accounting end of the business when you first came if you had been technically equipped for it." (The phrase "technically equipped" overawed and terrorized Clyde, for he scarcely understood what that meant.) "As it was," went on Gilbert, nonchalantly, "we had to do the best we could for you. We knew it was not very pleasant down there, but we couldn't do anything more for you at the time." He drummed on his desk with his fingers. "But the reason I called you up here to-day is this. I want to discuss with you a temporary vacancy that has occurred in one of our departments upstairs and which we are wondering—my father and I—whether you might be able to fill." Clyde's spirits rose amazingly. "Both my father and I," he went on, "have been thinking for some little time that we would like to do a little something for you, but as I say, your lack of practical training of any kind makes it very difficult for both of us. You haven't had either a commercial or a trade education of any kind, and that makes it doubly hard." He paused long enough to allow that to sink in—give Clyde the feeling that he was an interloper indeed. "Still," he added after a moment, "so long as we have seen fit to bring you on here, we have decided to give you a tryout at something better than you are doing. It won't do to let you stay down there indefinitely. Now, let me tell you a little something about what I have in mind," and he proceeded to explain the nature of the work on the fifth floor.

And when after a time Whiggam was sent for and appeared and had acknowledged Clyde's salutation, he observed: "Whiggam, I've just been telling my cousin here about our conversation this morning and what I told you about our plan to try him out as the head of that department. So if you'll just take him up to Mr. Liggett and have him or some one explain the nature of the work up there, I'll be obliged to you." He turned to his desk. "After that you can send him back to me," he added. "I want to talk to him again."

Then he arose and dismissed them both with an air, and

Whiggam, still somewhat dubious as to the experiment, but now very anxious to be pleasant to Clyde since he could not tell what he might become, led the way to Mr. Liggett's floor. And there, amid a thunderous hum of machines, Clyde was led to the extreme west of the building and into a much smaller department which was merely railed off from the greater chamber by a low fence. Here were about twenty-five girls and their assistants with baskets, who apparently were doing their best to cope with a constant stream of unstitched collar bundles which fell through several chutes from the floor above.

And now at once, after being introduced to Mr. Liggett, he was escorted to a small railed-off desk at which sat a short, plump girl of about his own years, not so very attractive, who arose as they approached. "This is Miss Todd," began Whiggam. "She's been in charge for about ten days now in the absence of Mrs. Angier. And what I want you to do now, Miss Todd, is to explain to Mr. Griffiths here just as quickly and clearly as you can what it is you do here. And then later in the day when he comes up here, I want you to help him to keep track of things until he sees just what is wanted and can do it himself. You'll do that, won't you?"

"Why, certainly, Mr. Whiggam. I'll be only too glad to," complied Miss Todd, and at once she began to take down the books of records and to show Clyde how the entry and discharge records were kept—also later how the stamping was done—how the basket girls took the descending bundles from the chutes and distributed them evenly according to the needs of the stamper and how later, as fast as they were stamped, other basket girls carried them to the stitchers outside. And Clyde, very much interested, felt that he could do it, only among so many women on a floor like this he felt very strange. There were so very, very many women—hundreds of them—stretching far and away between white walls and white columns to the eastern end of the building. And tall windows that reached from floor to ceiling let in a veritable flood of light. These girls were not all pretty. He saw them out of the tail of his eye as first Miss Todd and later Whiggam, and even Liggett, volunteered to impress points on him.

"The important thing," explained Whiggam after a time, "is to see that there is no mistake as to the number of thousands of dozens of collars that come down here and are stamped, and also that there's no delay in stamping them and getting them out to the stitchers. Also that the records of these girls' work is

kept accurately so that there won't be any mistakes as to their time."

At last Clyde saw what was required of him and the conditions under which he was about to work and said so. He was very nervous but quickly decided that if this girl could do the work, he could. And because Liggett and Whiggam, interested by his relationship to Gilbert, appeared very friendly and persisted in delaying here, saying that there was nothing he could not manage they were sure, he returned after a time with Whiggam to Gilbert who, on seeing him enter, at once observed: "Well, what's the answer? Yes or no. Do you think you can do it or do you think you can't?"

"Well, I know that I can do it," replied Clyde with a great deal of courage for him, yet with the private feeling that he might not make good unless fortune favored him some even now. There were so many things to be taken into consideration—the favor of those above as well as about him—and would they always favor him?

"Very good, then. Just be seated for a moment," went on Gilbert. "I want to talk to you some more in connection with that work up there. It looks easy to you, does it?"

"No, I can't say that it looks exactly easy," replied Clyde, strained and a little pale, for because of his inexperience he felt the thing to be a great opportunity—one that would require all his skill and courage to maintain. "Just the same I think I can do it. In fact I know I can and I'd like to try."

"Well, now, that sounds a little better," replied Gilbert crisply and more graciously. "And now I want to tell you something more about it. I don't suppose you ever thought there was a floor with that many women on it, did you?"

"No, sir, I didn't," replied Clyde. "I knew they were somewhere in the building, but I didn't know just where."

"Exactly," went on Gilbert. "This plant is practically operated by women from cellar to roof. In the manufacturing department, I venture to say there are ten women to every man. On that account every one in whom we entrust any responsibility around here must be known to us as to their moral and religious character. If you weren't related to us, and if we didn't feel that because of that we knew a little something about you, we wouldn't think of putting you up there or anywhere in this factory over anybody until we did know. But don't think because you're related to us that we won't hold you strictly to account for everything that goes on up there and for your con-

duct. We will, and all the more so because you are related to us. You understand that, do you? And why—the meaning of the Griffiths name here?"

"Yes, sir," replied Clyde.

"Very well, then," went on Gilbert. "Before we place any one here in any position of authority, we have to be absolutely sure that they're going to behave themselves as gentlemen always —that the women who are working here are going to receive civil treatment always. If a young man, or an old one for that matter, comes in here at any time and imagines that because there are women here he's going to be allowed to play about and neglect his work and flirt or cut up, that fellow is doomed to a short stay here. The men and women who work for us have got to feel that they are employees first, last and all the time—and they have to carry that attitude out into the street with them. And unless they do it, and we hear anything about it, that man or woman is done for so far as we are concerned. We don't want 'em and we won't have 'em. And once we're through with 'em, we're through with 'em."

He paused and stared at Clyde as much as to say: "Now I hope I have made myself clear. Also that we will never have any trouble in so far as you are concerned."

And Clyde replied: "Yes, I understand. I think that's right. In fact I know that's the way it has to be."

"And ought to be," added Gilbert.

"And ought to be," echoed Clyde.

At the same time he was wondering whether it was really true as Gilbert said. Had he not heard the mill girls already spoken about in a slighting way? Yet consciously at the moment he did not connect himself in thought with any of these girls upstairs. His present mood was that, because of his abnormal interest in girls, it would be better if he had nothing to do with them at all, never spoke to any of them, kept a very distant and cold attitude, such as Gilbert was holding toward him. It must be so, at least if he wished to keep his place here. And he was now determined to keep it and to conduct himself always as his cousin wished.

"Well, now, then," went on Gilbert as if to supplement Clyde's thoughts in this respect, "what I want to know of you is, if I trouble to put you in that department, even temporarily, can I trust you to keep a level head on your shoulders and go about your work conscientiously and not have your head turned or disturbed by the fact that you're working among a lot of women and girls?"

"Yes, sir, I know you can," replied Clyde very much impressed by his cousin's succinct demand, although, after Rita, a little dubious.

"If I can't, now is the time to say so," persisted Gilbert. "By blood you're a member of this family. And to our help here, and especially in a position of this kind, you represent us. We can't have anything come up in connection with you at any time around here that won't be just right. So I want you to be on your guard and watch your step from now on. Not the least thing must occur in connection with you that any one can comment on unfavorably. You understand, do you?"

"Yes, sir," replied Clyde most solemnly. "I understand that. I'll conduct myself properly or I'll get out." And he was thinking seriously at the moment that he could and would. The large number of girls and women upstairs seemed very remote and of no consequence just then.

"Very good. Now, I'll tell you what else I want you to do. I want you to knock off for the day and go home and sleep on this and think it over well. Then come back in the morning and go to work up there, if you still feel the same. Your salary from now on will be twenty-five dollars, and I want you to dress neat and clean so that you will be an example to the other men who have charge of departments."

He arose coldly and distantly, but Clyde, very much encouraged and enthused by the sudden jump in salary, as well as the admonition in regard to dressing well, felt so grateful toward his cousin that he longed to be friendly with him. To be sure, he was hard and cold and vain, but still he must think something of him, and his uncle too, or they would not choose to do all this for him and so speedily. And if ever he were able to make friends with him, win his way into his good graces, think how prosperously he would be placed here, what commercial and social honors might not come to him?

So elated was he at the moment that he bustled out of the great plant with a jaunty stride, resolved among other things that from now on, come what might, and as a test of himself in regard to life and work, he was going to be all that his uncle and cousin obviously expected of him—cool, cold even, and if necessary severe, where these women or girls of this department were concerned. No more relations with Dillard or Rita or anybody like that for the present anyhow.

CHAPTER XII

THE import of twenty-five dollars a week! Of being the head of a department employing twenty-five girls! Of wearing a good suit of clothes again! Sitting at an official desk in a corner commanding a charming river view and feeling that at last, after almost two months in that menial department below stairs, he was a figure of some consequence in this enormous institution! And because of his relationship and new dignity, Whiggam, as well as Liggett, hovering about with advice and genial and helpful comments from time to time. And some of the managers of the other departments including several from the front office—an auditor and an advertising man occasionally pausing in passing to say hello. And the details of the work sufficiently mastered to permit him to look about him from time to time, taking an interest in the factory as a whole, its processes and supplies, such as where the great volume of linen and cotton came from, how it was cut in an enormous cutting room above this one, holding hundreds of experienced cutters receiving very high wages; how there was an employment bureau for recruiting help, a company doctor, a company hospital, a special dining room in the main building, where the officials of the company were allowed to dine—but no others—and that he, being an accredited department head could now lunch with those others in that special restaurant if he chose and could afford to. Also he soon learned that several miles out from Lycurgus, on the Mohawk, near a hamlet called Van Troup, was an inter-factory country club, to which most of the department heads of the various factories about belonged, but, alas, as he also learned, Griffiths and Company did not really favor their officials mixing with those of any other company, and for that reason few of them did. Yet he, being a member of the family, as Liggett once said to him, could probably do as he chose as to that. But he decided, because of the strong warnings of Gilbert, as well as his high blood relations with this family, that he had better remain as aloof as possible. And so smiling and being as genial as possible to all, nevertheless for the most part, and in order to avoid Dillard and others of his ilk, and although he was much more lonely than otherwise he would have been, returning to his room or the public squares of this and near-by cities

on Saturday and Sunday afternoons, and even, since he thought this might please his uncle and cousin and so raise him in their esteem, beginning to attend one of the principal Presbyterian churches—the Second or High Street Church, to which on occasion, as he had already learned, the Griffiths themselves were accustomed to resort. Yet without ever coming in contact with them in person, since from June to September they spent their week-ends at Greenwood Lake, to which most of the society life of this region as yet resorted.

In fact the summer life of Lycurgus, in so far as its society was concerned, was very dull. Nothing in particular ever eventuated then in the city, although previous to this, in May, there had been various affairs in connection with the Griffiths and their friends which Clyde had either read about or saw at a distance—a graduation reception and dance at the Snedeker School, a lawn fête upon the Griffiths' grounds, with a striped marquee tent on one part of the lawn and Chinese lanterns hung in among the trees. Clyde had observed this quite by accident one evening as he was walking alone about the city. It raised many a curious and eager thought in regard to this family, its high station and his relation to it. But having placed him comfortably in a small official position which was not arduous, the Griffiths now proceeded to dismiss him from their minds. He was doing well enough, and they would see something more of him later, perhaps.

And then a little later he read in the Lycurgus *Star* that there was to be staged on June twentieth the annual inter-city automobile floral parade and contest (Fonda, Gloversville, Amsterdam and Schenectady), which this year was to be held in Lycurgus and which was the last local social affair of any consequence, as *The Star* phrased it, before the annual hegira to the lakes and mountains of those who were able to depart for such places. And the names of Bella, Bertine and Sondra, to say nothing of Gilbert, were mentioned as contestants or defendants of the fair name of Lycurgus. And since this occurred on a Saturday afternoon, Clyde, dressed in his best, yet decidedly wishing to obscure himself as an ordinary spectator, was able to see once more the girl who had so infatuated him on sight, obviously breasting a white rose-surfaced stream and guiding her craft with a paddle covered with yellow daffodils—a floral representation of some Indian legend in connection with the Mohawk River. With her dark hair filleted Indian fashion with a yellow feather and brown-eyed susans, she was arresting enough not only to capture a prize, but to recapture Clyde's fancy. How marvelous to be of that world.

In the same parade he had seen Gilbert Griffiths accompanied by a very attractive girl chauffeuring one of four floats representing the four seasons. And while the one he drove was winter, with this local society girl posed in ermine with white roses for snow all about, directly behind came another float, which presented Bella Griffiths as spring, swathed in filmy draperies and crouching beside a waterfall of dark violets. The effect was quite striking and threw Clyde into a mood in regard to love, youth and romance which was delicious and yet very painful to him. Perhaps he should have retained Rita, after all.

In the meantime he was living on as before, only more spaciously in so far as his own thoughts were concerned. For his first thought after receiving this larger allowance was that he had better leave Mrs. Cuppy's and secure a better room in some private home which, if less advantageously situated for him, would be in a better street. It took him out of all contact with Dillard. And now, since his uncle had promoted him, some representative of his or Gilbert's might wish to stop by to see him about something. And what would one such think if he found him living in a small room such as he now occupied?

Ten days after his salary was raised, therefore, and because of the import of his name, he found it possible to obtain a room in one of the better houses and streets—Jefferson Avenue, which paralleled Wykeagy Avenue, only a few blocks farther out. It was the home of a widow whose husband had been a mill manager and who let out two rooms without board in order to be able to maintain this home, which was above the average for one of such position in Lycurgus. And Mrs. Peyton, having long been a resident of the city and knowing much about the Griffiths, recognized not only the name but the resemblance of Clyde to Gilbert. And being intensely interested by this, as well as his general appearance, she at once offered him an exceptional room for so little as five dollars a week, which he took at once.

In connection with his work at the factory, however, and in spite of the fact that he had made such drastic resolutions in regard to the help who were beneath him, still it was not always possible for him to keep his mind on the mere mechanical routine of the work or off of this company of girls as girls, since at least a few of them were attractive. For it was summer—late June. And over all the factory, especially around two, three and four in the afternoon, when the endless repetition of the work seemed to pall on all, a practical indifference not remote from languor and in some instances sensuality, seemed to creep over the place. There were so many women and girls of so many different types

and moods. And here they were so remote from men or idle pleasure in any form, all alone with just him, really. Again the air within the place was nearly always heavy and physically relaxing, and through the many open windows that reached from floor to ceiling could be seen the Mohawk swirling and rippling, its banks carpeted with green grass and in places shaded by trees. Always it seemed to hint of pleasures which might be found by idling along its shores. And since these workers were employed so mechanically as to leave their minds free to roam from one thought of pleasure to another, they were for the most part thinking of themselves always and what they would do, assuming that they were not here chained to this routine.

And because their moods were so brisk and passionate, they were often prone to fix on the nearest object. And since Clyde was almost always the only male present—and in these days in his best clothes—they were inclined to fix on him. They were, indeed, full of all sorts of fantastic notions in regard to his private relations with the Griffiths and their like, where he lived and how, whom in the way of a girl he might be interested in. And he, in turn, when not too constrained by the memory of what Gilbert Griffiths had said to him, was inclined to think of them—certain girls in particular—with thoughts that bordered on the sensual. For, in spite of the wishes of the Griffiths Company, and the discarded Rita or perhaps because of her, he found himself becoming interested in three different girls here. They were of a pagan and pleasure-loving turn—this trio—and they thought Clyde very handsome. Ruza Nikoforitch—a Russian-American girl—big and blonde and animal, with swimming brown eyes, a snub fat nose and chin, was very much drawn to him. Only, such was the manner with which he carried himself always, that she scarcely dared to let herself think so. For to her, with his hair so smoothly parted, torsoed in a bright-striped shirt, the sleeves of which in this weather were rolled to the elbows, he seemed almost too perfect to be real. She admired his clean, brown polished shoes, his brightly buckled black leather belt, and the loose four-in-hand tie he wore.

Again there was Martha Bordaloue, a stocky, brisk Canadian-French girl of trim, if rotund, figure and ankles, hair of a reddish gold and eyes of greenish blue with puffy pink cheeks and hands that were plump and yet small. Ignorant and pagan, she saw in Clyde some one whom, even for so much as an hour, assuming that he would, she would welcome—and that most eagerly. At the same time, being feline and savage, she hated all or any who even so much as presumed to attempt to interest him, and

despised Ruza for that reason. For as she could see Ruza tried to nudge or lean against Clyde whenever he came sufficiently near. At the same time she herself sought by every single device known to her—her shirtwaist left open to below the borders of her white breast, her outer skirt lifted trimly above her calves when working, her plump round arms displayed to the shoulders to show him that physically at least she was worth his time. And the sly sighs and languorous looks when he was near, which caused Ruza to exclaim one day: "That French cat! He should look at her!" And because of Clyde she had an intense desire to strike her.

And yet again there was the stocky and yet gay Flora Brandt, a decidedly low class American type of coarse and yet enticing features, black hair, large, swimming and heavily-lashed black eyes, a snub nose and full and sensuous and yet pretty lips, and a vigorous and not ungraceful body, who, from day to day, once he had been there a little while, had continued to look at him as if to say—"What! You don't think I'm attractive?" And with a look which said: "How can you continue to ignore me? There are lots of fellows who would be delighted to have your chance, I can tell you."

And, in connection with these three, the thought came to him after a time that since they were so different, more common as he thought, less well-guarded and less sharply interested in the conventional aspects of their contacts, it might be possible and that without detection on the part of any one for him to play with one or another of them—or all three in turn if his interest should eventually carry him so far—without being found out, particularly if beforehand he chose to impress on them the fact that he was condescending when he noticed them at all. Most certainly, if he could judge by their actions, they would willingly reward him by letting him have his way with them somewhere, and think nothing of it afterward if he chose to ignore them, as he must to keep his position here. Nevertheless, having given his word as he had to Gilbert Griffiths, he was still in no mood to break it. These were merely thoughts which from time to time were aroused in him by a situation which for him was difficult in the extreme. His was a disposition easily and often intensely inflamed by the chemistry of sex and the formula of beauty. He could not easily withstand the appeal, let alone the call, of sex. And by the actions and approaches of each in turn he was surely tempted at times, especially in these warm and languorous summer days, with no place to go and no single intimate to commune with. From time to time he could not resist drawing near to

these very girls who were most bent on tempting him, although in the face of their looks and nudges, not very successfully concealed at times, he maintained an aloofness and an assumed indifference which was quite remarkable for him.

But just about this time there was a rush of orders, which necessitated, as both Whiggam and Liggett advised, Clyde taking on a few extra "try-out" girls who were willing to work for the very little they could earn at the current piece work rate until they had mastered the technique, when of course they would be able to earn more. There were many such who applied at the employment branch of the main office on the ground floor. In slack times all applications were rejected or the sign hung up "No Help Wanted."

And since Clyde was relatively new to this work, and thus far had neither hired nor discharged any one, it was agreed between Whiggam and Liggett that all the help thus sent up should first be examined by Liggett, who was looking for extra stitchers also. And in case any were found who promised to be satisfactory as stampers, they were to be turned over to Clyde with the suggestion that he try them. Only before bringing any one back to Clyde, Liggett was very careful to explain that in connection with this temporary hiring and discharging there was a system. One must not ever give a new employee, however well they did, the feeling that they were doing anything but moderately well until their capacity had been thoroughly tested. It interfered with their proper development as piece workers, the greatest results that could be obtained by any one person. Also one might freely take on as many girls as were needed to meet any such situation, and then, once the rush was over, as freely drop them—unless, occasionally, a very speedy worker was found among the novices. In that case it was always advisable to try to retain such a person, either by displacing a less satisfactory person or transferring some one from some other department, to make room for new blood and new energy.

The next day, after this notice of a rush, back came four girls at different times and escorted always by Liggett, who in each instance explained to Clyde: "Here's a girl who might do for you. Miss Tyndal is her name. You might give her a try-out." Or, "You might see if this girl will be of any use to you." And Clyde, after he had questioned them as to where they had worked, what the nature of the general working experiences were, and whether they lived at home here in Lycurgus or alone (the bachelor girl was not much wanted by the factory) would explain the nature of the work and pay, and then call Miss Todd, who

in her turn would first take them to the rest room where were lockers for their coats, and then to one of the tables where they would be shown what the process was. And later it was Miss Todd's and Clyde's business to discover how well they were getting on and whether it was worth while to retain them or not.

Up to this time, apart from the girls to whom he was so definitely drawn, Clyde was not so very favorably impressed with the type of girl who was working here. For the most part, as he saw them, they were of a heavy and rather unintelligent company, and he had been thinking that smarter-looking girls might possibly be secured. Why not? Were there none in Lycurgus in the factory world? So many of these had fat hands, broad faces, heavy legs and ankles. Some of them even spoke with an accent, being Poles or the children of Poles, living in that slum north of the mill. And they were all concerned with catching a "feller," going to some dancing place with him afterwards, and little more. Also, Clyde had noticed that the American types who were here were of a decidedly different texture, thinner, more nervous and for the most part more angular, and with a general reserve due to prejudices, racial, moral and religious, which would not permit them to mingle with these others or with any men, apparently.

But among the extras or try-outs that were brought to him during this and several succeeding days, finally came one who interested Clyde more than any girl whom he had seen here so far. She was, as he decided on sight, more intelligent and pleasing—more spiritual—though apparently not less vigorous, if more gracefully proportioned. As a matter of fact, as he saw her at first, she appeared to him to possess a charm which no one else in this room had, a certain wistfulness and wonder combined with a kind of self-reliant courage and determination which marked her at once as one possessed of will and conviction to a degree. Nevertheless, as she said, she was inexperienced in this kind of work, and highly uncertain as to whether she would prove of service here or anywhere.

Her name was Roberta Alden, and, as she at once explained, previous to this she had been working in a small hosiery factory in a town called Trippetts Mills fifty miles north of Lycurgus. She had on a small brown hat that did not look any too new, and was pulled low over a face that was small and regular and pretty and that was haloed by bright, light brown hair. Her eyes were of a translucent gray blue. Her little suit was commonplace, and her shoes were not so very new-looking and quite solidly-soled. She looked practical and serious and yet so

bright and clean and willing and possessed of so much hope and vigor that along with Liggett, who had first talked with her, he was at once taken with her. Distinctly she was above the average of the girls in this room. And he could not help wondering about her as he talked to her, for she seemed so tense, a little troubled as to the outcome of this interview, as though this was a very great adventure for her.

She explained that up to this time she had been living with her parents near a town called Biltz, but was now living with friends here. She talked so honestly and simply that Clyde was very much moved by her, and for this reason wished to help her. At the same time he wondered if she were not really above the type of work she was seeking. Her eyes were so round and blue and intelligent—her lips and nose and ears and hands so small and pleasing.

"You're going to live in Lycurgus, then, if you can get work here?" he said, more to be talking to her than anything else.

"Yes," she said, looking at him most directly and frankly.

"And the name again?" He took down a record pad.

"Roberta Alden."

"And your address here?"

"228 Taylor Street."

"I don't even know where that is myself," he informed her because he liked talking to her. "I haven't been here so very long, you see." He wondered just why afterwards he had chosen to tell her as much about himself so swiftly. Then he added: "I don't know whether Mr. Liggett has told you all about the work here. But it's piece work, you know, stamping collars. I'll show you if you'll just step over here," and he led the way to a near-by table where the stampers were. After letting her observe how it was done, and without calling Miss Todd, he picked up one of the collars and proceeded to explain all that had been previously explained to him.

At the same time, because of the intentness with which she observed him and his gestures, the seriousness with which she appeared to take all that he said, he felt a little nervous and embarrassed. There was something quite searching and penetrating about her glance. After he had explained once more what the bundle rate was, and how much some made and how little others, and she had agreed that she would like to try, he called Miss Todd, who took her to the locker room to hang up her hat and coat. Then presently he saw her returning, a fluff of light hair about her forehead, her cheeks slightly flushed, her eyes very intent and serious. And as advised by Miss Todd, he

saw her turn back her sleeves, revealing a pretty pair of forearms. Then she fell to, and by her gestures Clyde guessed that she would prove both speedy and accurate. For she seemed most anxious to obtain and keep this place.

After she had worked a little while, he went to her side and watched her as she picked up and stamped the collars piled beside her and threw them to one side. Also the speed and accuracy with which she did it. Then, because for a second she turned and looked at him, giving him an innocent and yet cheerful and courageous smile, he smiled back, most pleased.

"Well, I guess you'll make out all right," he ventured to say, since he could not help feeling that she would. And instantly, for a second only, she turned and smiled again. And Clyde, in spite of himself, was quite thrilled. He liked her on the instant, but because of his own station here, of course, as he now decided, as well as his promise to Gilbert, he must be careful about being congenial with any of the help in this room—even as charming a girl as this. It would not do. He had been guarding himself in connection with the others and must with her too, a thing which seemed a little strange to him then, for he was very much drawn to her. She was so pretty and cute. Yet she was a working girl, as he remembered now, too—a factory girl, as Gilbert would say, and he was her superior. But she *was* so pretty and cute.

Instantly he went on to others who had been put on this same day, and finally coming to Miss Todd asked her to report pretty soon on how Miss Alden was getting along—that he wanted to know.

But at the same time that he had addressed Roberta, and she had smiled back at him, Ruza Nikoforitch, who was working two tables away, nudged the girl working next her, and without any one noting it, first winked, then indicated with a slight movement of the head both Clyde and Roberta. Her friend was to watch them. And after Clyde had gone away and Roberta was working as before, she leaned over and whispered: "He says she'll do already." Then she lifted her eyebrows and compressed her lips. And her friend replied, so softly that no one could hear her: "Pretty quick, eh? And he didn't seem to see any one else at all before."

Then the twain smiled most wisely, a choice bit between them. Ruza Nikoforitch was jealous.

CHAPTER XIII

THE reasons why a girl of Roberta's type should be seeking employment with Griffiths and Company at this time and in this capacity are of some point. For, somewhat after the fashion of Clyde in relation to his family and his life, she too considered her life a great disappointment. She was the daughter of Titus Alden, a farmer—of near Biltz, a small town in Mimico County, some fifty miles north. And from her youth up she had seen little but poverty. Her father—the youngest of three sons of Ephraim Alden, a farmer in this region before him—was so unsuccessful that at forty-eight he was still living in a house which, though old and much in need of repair at the time his father willed it to him, was now bordering upon a state of dilapidation. The house itself, while primarily a charming example of that excellent taste which produced those delightful gabled homes which embellish the average New England town and street, had been by now so reduced for want of paint, shingles, and certain flags which had once made a winding walk from a road gate to the front door, that it presented a decidedly melancholy aspect to the world, as though it might be coughing and saying: "Well, things are none too satisfactory with me."

The interior of the house corresponded with the exterior. The floor boards and stair boards were loose and creaked most eerily at times. Some of the windows had shades—some did not. Furniture of both an earlier and a later date, but all in a somewhat decayed condition, intermingled and furnished it in some nondescript manner which need hardly be described.

As for the parents of Roberta, they were excellent examples of that native type of Americanism which resists facts and reveres illusion. Titus Alden was one of that vast company of individuals who are born, pass through and die out of the world without ever quite getting any one thing straight. They appear, blunder, and end in a fog. Like his two brothers, both older and almost as nebulous, Titus was a farmer solely because his father had been a farmer. And he was here on this farm because it had been willed to him and because it was easier to stay here and try to work this than it was to go elsewhere. He was a Republican because his father before him was a Republican and because

this county was Republican. It never occurred to him to be otherwise. And, as in the case of his politics and his religion, he had borrowed all his notions of what was right and wrong from those about him. A single, serious, intelligent or rightly informing book had never been read by any member of this family—not one. But they were nevertheless excellent, as conventions, morals and religions go—honest, upright, God-fearing and respectable.

In so far as the daughter of these parents was concerned, and in the face of natural gifts which fitted her for something better than this world from which she derived, she was still, in part, at least, a reflection of the religious and moral notions there and then prevailing,—the views of the local ministers and the laity in general. At the same time, because of a warm, imaginative, sensuous temperament, she was filled—once she reached fifteen and sixteen—with the world-old dream of all of Eve's daughters from the homeliest to the fairest—that her beauty or charm might some day and ere long smite bewitchingly and so irresistibly the soul of a given man or men.

So it was that although throughout her infancy and girlhood she was compelled to hear of and share a depriving and toilsome poverty, still, because of her innate imagination, she was always thinking of something better. Maybe, some day, who knew, a larger city like Albany or Utica! A newer and greater life.

And then what dreams! And in the orchard of a spring day later, between her fourteenth and eighteenth years when the early May sun was making pink lamps of every aged tree and the ground was pinkly carpeted with the falling and odorous petals, she would stand and breathe and sometimes laugh, or even sigh, her arms upreached or thrown wide to life. To be alive! To have youth and the world before one. To think of the eyes and the smile of some youth of the region who by the merest chance had passed her and looked, and who might never look again, but who, nevertheless, in so doing, had stirred her young soul to dreams.

None the less she was shy, and hence recessive—afraid of men, especially the more ordinary types common to this region. And these in turn, repulsed by her shyness and refinement, tended to recede from her, for all of her physical charm, which was too delicate for this region. Nevertheless, at the age of sixteen, having repaired to Biltz in order to work in Appleman's Dry Goods Store for five dollars a week, she saw many young men who attracted her. But here because of her mood in regard to her family's position, as well as the fact that to her inexperi-

enced eyes they appeared so much better placed than herself, she was convinced that they would not be interested in her. And here again it was her own mood that succeeded in alienating them almost completely. Nevertheless she remained working for Mr. Appleman until she was between eighteen and nineteen, all the while sensing that she was really doing nothing for herself because she was too closely identified with her home and her family, who appeared to need her.

And then about this time, an almost revolutionary thing for this part of the world occurred. For because of the cheapness of labor in such an extremely rural section, a small hosiery plant was built at Trippetts Mills. And though Roberta, because of the views and standards that prevailed hereabout, had somehow conceived of this type of work as beneath her, still she was fascinated by the reports of the high wages to be paid. Accordingly she repaired to Trippetts Mills, where, boarding at the house of a neighbor who had previously lived in Biltz, and returning home every Saturday afternoon, she planned to bring together the means for some further form of practical education—a course at a business college at Homer or Lycurgus or somewhere which might fit her for something better—bookkeeping or stenography.

And in connection with this dream and this attempted saving two years went by. And in the meanwhile, although she earned more money (eventually twelve dollars a week), still, because various members of her family required so many little things and she desired to alleviate to a degree the privations of these others from which she suffered, nearly all that she earned went to them.

And again here, as at Biltz, most of the youths of the town who were better suited to her intellectually and temperamentally —still looked upon the mere factory type as beneath them in many ways. And although Roberta was far from being that type, still having associated herself with them she was inclined to absorb some of their psychology in regard to themselves. Indeed by then she was fairly well satisfied that no one of these here in whom she was interested would be interested in her—at least not with any legitimate intentions.

And then two things occurred which caused her to think, not only seriously of marriage, but of her own future, whether she married or not. For her sister, Agnes, now twenty, and three years her junior, having recently reëncountered a young schoolmaster who some time before had conducted the district school near the Alden farm, and finding him more to her taste now

than when she had been in school, had decided to marry him. And this meant, as Roberta saw it, that she was about to take on the appearance of a spinster unless she married soon. Yet she did not quite see what was to be done until the hosiery factory at Trippetts Mills suddenly closed, never to reopen. And then, in order to assist her mother, as well as help with her sister's wedding, she returned to Biltz.

But then there came a third thing which decidedly affected her dreams and plans. Grace Marr, a girl whom she had met at Trippetts Mills, had gone to Lycurgus and after a few weeks there had managed to connect herself with the Finchley Vacuum Cleaner Company at a salary of fifteen dollars a week and at once wrote to Roberta telling her of the opportunities that were then present in Lycurgus. For in passing the Griffiths Company, which she did daily, she had seen a large sign posted over the east employment door reading "Girls Wanted." And inquiry revealed the fact that girls at this company were always started at nine or ten dollars, quickly taught some one of the various phases of piece work and then, once they were proficient, were frequently able to earn as much as from fourteen to sixteen dollars, according to their skill. And since board and room were only consuming seven of what she earned, she was delighted to communicate to Roberta, whom she liked very much, that she might come and room with her if she wished.

Roberta, having reached the place where she felt that she could no longer endure farm life but must act for herself once more, finally arranged with her mother to leave in order that she might help her more directly with her wages.

But once in Lycurgus and employed by Clyde, her life, after the first flush of self-interest which a change so great implied for her, was not so much more enlarged socially or materially either, for that matter, over what it had been in Biltz and Trippetts Mills. For, despite the genial intimacy of Grace Marr—a girl not nearly as attractive as Roberta, and who, because of Roberta's charm and for the most part affected gayety, counted on her to provide a cheer and companionship which otherwise she would have lacked—still the world into which she was inducted here was scarcely any more liberal or diversified than that from which she sprang.

For, to begin with, the Newtons, sister and brother-in-law of Grace Marr, with whom she lived, and who, despite the fact that they were not unkindly, proved to be, almost more so than were the types with whom, either in Biltz or Trippetts Mills, she had been in constant contact, the most ordinary small town mill

workers—religious and narrow to a degree. George Newton, as every one could see and feel, was a pleasant if not very emotional or romantic person who took his various small plans in regard to himself and his future as of the utmost importance. Primarily he was saving what little cash he could out of the wages he earned as threadman in the Cranston Wickwire factory to enable him to embark upon some business for which he thought himself fitted. And to this end, and to further enhance his meager savings, he had joined with his wife in the scheme of taking over an old house in Taylor Street which permitted the renting of enough rooms to carry the rent and in addition to supply the food for the family and five boarders, counting their labor and worries in the process as nothing. And on the other hand, Grace Marr, as well as Newton's wife, Mary, were of that type that here as elsewhere find the bulk of their social satisfaction in such small matters as relate to the organization of a small home, the establishing of its import and integrity in a petty and highly conventional neighborhood and the contemplation of life and conduct through the lens furnished by a purely sectarian creed.

And so, once part and parcel of this particular household, Roberta found after a time, that it, if not Lycurgus, was narrow and restricted—not wholly unlike the various narrow and restricted homes at Biltz. And these lines, according to the Newtons and their like, to be strictly observed. No good could come of breaking them. If you were a factory employee you should accommodate yourself to the world and customs of the better sort of Christian factory employees. Every day therefore—and that not so very long after she had arrived—she found herself up and making the best of a not very satisfactory breakfast in the Newton dining room, which was usually shared by Grace and two other girls of nearly their own age—Opal Feliss and Olive Pope—who were connected with the Cranston Wickwire Company. Also by a young electrician by the name of Fred Shurlock, who worked for the City Lighting Plant. And immediately after breakfast joining a long procession that day after day at this hour made for the mills across the river. For just outside her own door she invariably met with a company of factory girls and women, boys and men, of the same relative ages, to say nothing of many old and weary-looking women who looked more like wraiths than human beings, who had issued from the various streets and houses of this vicinity. And as the crowd, because of the general inpour into it from various streets, thickened at Central Avenue, there was much ogling of the prettier girls by a certain type of factory man, who, not knowing any

of them, still sought, as Roberta saw it, unlicensed contacts and even worse. Yet there was much giggling and simpering on the part of girls of a certain type who were by no means as severe as most of those she had known elsewhere. Shocking!

And at night the same throng, re-forming at the mills, crossing the bridge at the depot and returning as it had come. And Roberta, because of her social and moral training and mood, and in spite of her decided looks and charm and strong desires, feeling alone and neglected. Oh, how sad to see the world so gay and she so lonely. And it was always after six when she reached home. And after dinner there was really nothing much of anything to do unless she and Grace attended one or another of the moving picture theaters or she could bring herself to consent to join the Newtons and Grace at a meeting of the Methodist Church.

None the less once part and parcel of this household and working for Clyde she was delighted with the change. This big city. This fine Central Avenue with its stores and moving picture theaters. These great mills. And again this Mr. Griffiths, so young, attractive, smiling and interested in her.

CHAPTER XIV

IN the same way Clyde, on encountering her, was greatly stirred. Since the abortive contact with Dillard, Rita and Zella, and afterwards the seemingly meaningless invitation to the Griffiths with its introduction to and yet only passing glimpse of such personages as Bella, Sondra Finchley and Bertine Cranston, he was lonely indeed. That high world! But plainly he was not to be allowed to share in it. And yet because of his vain hope in connection with it, he had chosen to cut himself off in this way. And to what end? Was he not if anything more lonely than ever? Mrs. Peyton! Going to and from his work but merely nodding to people or talking casually—or however sociably with one or another of the storekeepers along Central Avenue who chose to hail him—or even some of the factory girls here in whom he was not interested or with whom he did not dare to develop a friendship. What was that? Just nothing really. And yet as an offset to all this, of course, was he not a Griffiths and so entitled to their respect and reverence even on this account? What a situation really! What to do!

And at the same time, this Roberta Alden, once she was placed here in this fashion and becoming more familiar with local conditions, as well as the standing of Clyde, his charm, his evasive and yet sensible interest in her, was becoming troubled as to her state too. For once part and parcel of this local home she had joined she was becoming conscious of various local taboos and restrictions which made it seem likely that never at any time here would it be possible to express an interest in Clyde or any one above her officially. For there was a local taboo in regard to factory girls aspiring toward or allowing themselves to become interested in their official superiors. Religious, moral and reserved girls didn't do it. And again, as she soon discovered, the lines of demarcation and stratification between the rich and the poor in Lycurgus was as sharp as though cut by a knife or divided by a high wall. And another taboo in regard to all the foreign family girls and men,—ignorant, low, immoral, un-American! One should—above all—have nothing to do with them.

But among these people as she could see—the religious and moral, lower middle-class group to which she and all of her intimates belonged—dancing or local adventurous gayety, such as walking the streets or going to a moving picture theater—was also taboo. And yet she, herself, at this time, was becoming interested in dancing. Worse than this, the various young men and girls of the particular church which she and Grace Marr attended at first, were not inclined to see Roberta or Grace as equals, since they, for the most part, were members of older and more successful families of the town. And so it was that after a very few weeks of attendance of church affairs and services, they were about where they had been when they started—conventional and acceptable, but without the amount of entertainment and diversion which was normally reaching those who were of their same church but better placed.

And so it was that Roberta, after encountering Clyde and sensing the superior world in which she imagined he moved, and being so taken with the charm of his personality, was seized with the very virus of ambition and unrest that afflicted him. And every day that she went to the factory now she could not help but feel that his eyes were upon her in a quiet, seeking and yet doubtful way. Yet she also felt that he was too uncertain as to what she would think of any overture that he might make in her direction to risk a repulse or any offensive interpretation on her part. And yet at times, after the first two weeks of her stay here, she wishing that he would speak to her—that he would make some beginning—at other times that he must not dare—that it would be dreadful and impossible. The other girls there would see at once. And since they all plainly felt that he was too good or too remote for them, they would at once note that he was making an exception in her case and would put their own interpretation on it. And she knew the type of a girl who worked in the Griffiths stamping room would put but one interpretation on it,—that of looseness.

At the same time in so far as Clyde and his leaning toward her was concerned there was that rule laid down by Gilbert. And although, because of it, he had hitherto appeared not to notice or to give any more attention to one girl than another, still, once Roberta arrived, he was almost unconsciously inclined to drift by her table and pause in her vicinity to see how she was progressing. And, as he saw from the first, she was a quick and intelligent worker, soon mastering without much advice of any kind all the tricks of the work, and thereafter earning about

as much as any of the others—fifteen dollars a week. And her manner was always that of one who enjoyed it and was happy to have the privilege of working here. And pleased to have him pay any little attention to her.

At the same time he noted to his surprise and especially since to him she seemed so refined and different, a certain exuberance and gayety that was not only emotional, but in a delicate poetic way, sensual. Also that despite her difference and reserve she was able to make friends with and seemed to be able to understand the viewpoint of most of the foreign girls who were essentially so different from her. For, listening to her discuss the work here, first with Lena Schlict, Hoda Petkanas, Angelina Pitti and some others who soon chose to speak to her, he reached the conclusion that she was not nearly so conventional or standoffish as most of the other American girls. And yet she did not appear to lose their respect either.

Thus, one noontime, coming back from the office lunch downstairs a little earlier than usual, he found her and several of the foreign-family girls, as well as four of the American girls, surrounding Polish Mary, one of the gayest and roughest of the foreign-family girls, who was explaining in rather a high key how a certain "feller" whom she had met the night before had given her a beaded bag, and for what purpose.

"I should go with heem to be his sweetheart," she announced with a flourish, the while she waved the bag before the interested group. "And I say, I tack heem an' think on heem. Pretty nice bag, eh?" she added, holding it aloft and turning it about. "Tell me," she added with provoking and yet probably only mock serious eyes and waving the bag toward Roberta, "what shall I do with heem? Keep heem an' go with heem to be his sweetheart or give heem back? I like heem pretty much, that bag, you bet."

And although, according to the laws of her upbringing, as Clyde suspected, Roberta should have been shocked by all this, she was not, as he noticed—far from it. If one might have judged from her face, she was very much amused.

Instantly she replied with a gay smile: "Well, it all depends on how handsome he is, Mary. If he's very attractive, I think I'd string him along for a while, anyhow, and keep the bag as long as I could."

"Oh, but he no wait," declared Mary archly, and with plainly a keen sense of the riskiness of the situation, the while she winked at Clyde who had drawn near. "I got to give heem bag or be

sweetheart to-night, and so swell bag I never can buy myself." She eyed the bag archly and roguishly, her own nose crinkling with the humor of the situation. "What I do then?"

"Gee, this is pretty strong stuff for a little country girl like Miss Alden. She won't like this, maybe," thought Clyde to himself.

However, Roberta, as he now saw, appeared to be equal to the situation, for she pretended to be troubled. "Gee, you are in a fix," she commented. "I don't know what you'll do now." She opened her eyes wide and pretended to be greatly concerned. However, as Clyde could see, she was merely acting, but carrying it off very well.

And frizzled-haired Dutch Lena now leaned over to say: "I take it and him too, you bet, if you don't want him. Where is he? I got no feller now." She reached over as if to take the bag from Mary, who as quickly withdrew it. And there were squeals of delight from nearly all the girls in the room, who were amused by this eccentric horseplay. Even Roberta laughed loudly, a fact which Clyde noted with pleasure, for he liked all this rough humor, considering it mere innocent play.

"Well, maybe you're right, Lena," he heard her add just as the whistle blew and the hundreds of sewing machines in the next room began to hum. "A good man isn't to be found every day." Her blue eyes were twinkling and her lips, which were most temptingly modeled, were parted in a broad smile. There was much banter and more bluff in what she said than anything else, as Clyde could see, but he felt that she was not nearly as narrow as he had feared. She was human and gay and tolerant and good-natured. There was decidedly a very liberal measure of play in her. And in spite of the fact that her clothes were poor, the same little round brown hat and blue cloth dress that she had worn on first coming to work here, she was prettier than anyone else. And she never needed to paint her lips and cheeks like the foreign girls, whose faces at times looked like pink-frosted cakes. And how pretty were her arms and neck—plump and gracefully designed! And there was a certain grace and abandon about her as she threw herself into her work as though she really enjoyed it. As she worked fast during the hottest portions of the day, there would gather on her upper lip and chin and forehead little beads of perspiration which she was always pausing in her work to touch with her handkerchief, while to him, like jewels, they seemed only to enhance her charm.

Wonderful days, these, now for Clyde. For once more and here, where he could be near her the long day through, he had a

girl whom he could study and admire and by degrees proceed to crave with all of the desire of which he seemed to be capable—and with which he had craved Hortense Briggs—only with more satisfaction, since as he saw it she was simpler, more kindly and respectable. And though for quite a while at first Roberta appeared or pretended to be quite indifferent to or unconscious of him, still from the very first this was not true. She was only troubled as to the appropriate attitude for her. The beauty of his face and hands—the blackness and softness of his hair, the darkness and melancholy and lure of his eyes. He was attractive—oh, very. Beautiful, really, to her.

And then one day shortly thereafter, Gilbert Griffiths walking through here and stopping to talk to Clyde, she was led to imagine by this that Clyde was really much more of a figure socially and financially than she had previously thought. For just as Gilbert was approaching, Lena Schlict, who was working beside her, leaned over to say: "Here comes Mr. Gilbert Griffiths. His father owns this whole factory and when he dies, he'll get it, they say. And he's his cousin," she added, nodding toward Clyde. "They look a lot alike, don't they?"

"Yes, they do," replied Roberta, slyly studying not only Clyde but Gilbert, "only I think Mr. Clyde Griffiths is a little nicer looking, don't you?"

Hoda Petkanas, sitting on the other side of Roberta and overhearing this last remark, laughed. "That's what every one here thinks. He's not stuck up like that Mr. Gilbert Griffiths, either."

"Is he rich, too?" inquired Roberta, thinking of Clyde.

"I don't know. They say not," she pursed her lips dubiously, herself rather interested in Clyde along with the others. "He worked down in the shrinking room before he came up here. He was just working by the day, I guess. But he only came on here a little while ago to learn the business. Maybe he won't work in here much longer."

Roberta was suddenly troubled by this last remark. She had not been thinking, or so she had been trying to tell herself, of Clyde in any romantic way, and yet the thought that he might suddenly go at any moment, never to be seen by her any more, disturbed her now. He was so youthful, so brisk, so attractive. And so interested in her, too. Yes, that was plain. It was wrong to think that he would be interested in her—or to try to attract him by any least gesture of hers, since he was so important a person here—far above her.

For, true to her complex, the moment she heard that Clyde

was so highly connected and might even have money, she was not so sure that he could have any legitimate interest in her. For was she not a poor working girl? And was he not a very rich man's nephew? He would not marry her, of course. And what other legitimate thing would he want with her? She must be on her guard in regard to him.

CHAPTER XV

THE thoughts of Clyde at this time in regard to Roberta and his general situation in Lycurgus were for the most part confused and disturbing. For had not Gilbert warned him against associating with the help here? On the other hand, in so far as his actual daily life was concerned, his condition was socially the same as before. Apart from the fact that his move to Mrs. Peyton's had taken him into a better street and neighborhood, he was really not so well off as he had been at Mrs. Cuppy's. For there at least he had been in touch with those young people who would have been diverting enough had he felt that it would have been wise to indulge them. But now, aside from a bachelor brother who was as old as Mrs. Peyton herself, and a son thirty—slim and reserved, who was connected with one of the Lycurgus banks—he saw no one who could or would trouble to entertain him. Like the others with whom he came in contact, they thought him possessed of relationships which would make it unnecessary and even a bit presumptuous for them to suggest ways and means of entertaining him.

On the other hand, while Roberta was not of that high world to which he now aspired, still there was that about her which enticed him beyond measure. Day after day and because so much alone, and furthermore because of so strong a chemic or temperamental pull that was so definitely asserting itself, he could no longer keep his eyes off her—or she hers from him. There were evasive and yet strained and feverish eye-flashes between them. And after one such in his case—a quick and furtive glance on her part at times—by no means intended to be seen by him, he found himself weak and then feverish. Her pretty mouth, her lovely big eyes, her radiant and yet so often shy and evasive smile. And, oh, she had such pretty arms —such a trim, lithe, sentient, quick figure and movements. If he only dared be friendly with her—venture to talk with and then see her somewhere afterwards—if she only would and if he only dared.

Confusion. Aspiration. Hours of burning and yearning. For indeed he was not only puzzled but irritated by the anomalous and paradoxical contrasts which his life here presented—loneli-

ness and wistfulness as against the fact that it was being generally assumed by such as knew him that he was rather pleasantly and interestingly employed socially.

Therefore in order to enjoy himself in some way befitting his present rank, and to keep out of the sight of those who were imagining that he was being so much more handsomely entertertained than he was, he had been more recently, on Saturday afternoons and Sundays, making idle sightseeing trips to Gloversville, Fonda, Amsterdam and other places, as well as Gray and Crum Lakes, where there were boats, beaches and bathhouses, with bathing suits for rent. And there, because he was always thinking that if by chance he should be taken up by the Griffiths, he would need as many social accomplishments as possible, and by reason of encountering a man who took a fancy to him and who could both swim and dive, he learned to do both exceedingly well. But canoeing fascinated him really. He was pleased by the picturesque and summery appearance he made in an outing shirt and canvas shoes paddling about Crum Lake in one of the bright red or green or blue canoes that were leased by the hour. And at such times these summer scenes appeared to possess an airy, fairy quality, especially with a summer cloud or two hanging high above in the blue. And so his mind indulged itself in day dreams as to how it would feel to be a member of one of the wealthy groups that frequented the more noted resorts of the north—Racquette Lake—Schroon Lake—Lake George and Champlain—dance, golf, tennis, canoe with those who could afford to go to such places—the rich of Lycurgus.

But it was about this time that Roberta with her friend Grace found Crum Lake and had decided on it, with the approval of Mr. and Mrs. Newton, as one of the best and most reserved of all the smaller watering places about here. And so it was that they, too, were already given to riding out to the pavilion on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon, and once there following the west shore along which ran a well-worn footpath which led to clumps of trees, underneath which they sat and looked at the water, for neither could row a boat or swim. Also there were wild flowers and berry bushes to be plundered. And from certain marshy spots, to be reached by venturing out for a score of feet or more, it was possible to reach and take white lilies with their delicate yellow hearts. They were decidedly tempting and on two occasions already the marauders had brought Mrs. Newton large armfuls of blooms from the fields and shore line here.

On the third Sunday afternoon in July, Clyde, as lonely and

rebellious as ever, was paddling about in a dark blue canoe along the south bank of the lake about a mile and a half from the boathouse. His coat and hat were off, and in a seeking and half resentful mood he was imagining vain things in regard to the type of life he would really like to lead. At different points on the lake in canoes, or their more clumsy companions, the row-boats, were boys and girls, men and women. And over the water occasionally would come their laughter or bits of their conversation. And in the distance would be other canoes and other dreamers, happily in love, as Clyde invariably decided, that being to him the sharpest contrast to his own lorn state.

At any rate, the sight of any other youth thus romantically engaged with his girl was sufficient to set dissonantly jangling the repressed and protesting libido of his nature. And this would cause his mind to paint another picture in which, had fortune favored him in the first place by birth, he would now be in some canoe on Schroon or Racquette or Champlain Lake with Sondra Finchley or some such girl, paddling and looking at the shores of a scene more distingué than this. Or might he not be riding or playing tennis, or in the evening dancing or racing from place to place in some high-powered car, Sondra by his side? He felt so out of it, so lonely and restless and tortured by all that he saw here, for everywhere that he looked he seemed to see love, romance, contentment. What to do? Where to go? He could not go on alone like this forever. He was too miserable.

In memory as well as mood his mind went back to the few gay happy days he had enjoyed in Kansas City before that dreadful accident—Ratterer, Hegglund, Higby, Tina Kogel, Hortense, Ratterer's sister Louise—in short, the gay company of which he was just beginning to be a part when that terrible accident had occurred. And next to Dillard, Rita, Zella,—a companionship that would have been better than this, certainly. Were the Griffiths never going to do any more for him than this? Had he only come here to be sneered at by his cousin, pushed aside, or rather completely ignored by all the bright company of which the children of his rich uncle were a part? And so plainly, from so many interesting incidents, even now in this dead summertime, he could see how privileged and relaxed and apparently decidedly happy were those of that circle. Notices in the local papers almost every day as to their coming and going here and there, the large and expensive cars of Samuel as well as Gilbert Griffiths parked outside the main office entrance on such days as they were in Lycurgus—an occasional group of young society figures to be seen

before the grill of the Lycurgus Hotel, or before one of the fine homes in Wykeagy Avenue, some one having returned to the city for an hour or a night.

And in the factory itself, whenever either was there—Gilbert or Samuel—in the smartest of summer clothes and attended by either Messrs. Smillie, Latch, Gotboy or Burkey, all high officials of the company, making a most austere and even regal round of the immense plant and consulting with or listening to the reports of the various minor department heads. And yet here was he—a full cousin to this same Gilbert, a nephew to this distinguished Samuel—being left to drift and pine by himself, and for no other reason than, as he could now clearly see, he was not good enough. His father was not as able as this, his great uncle—his mother (might Heaven keep her) not as distinguished or as experienced as his cold, superior, indifferent aunt. Might it not be best to leave? Had he not made a foolish move, after all, in coming on here? What, if anything, did these high relatives ever intend to do for him?

In loneliness and resentment and disappointment, his mind now wandered from the Griffiths and their world, and particularly that beautiful Sondra Finchley, whom he recalled with a keen and biting thrill, to Roberta and the world which she as well as he was occupying here. For although a poor factory girl, she was still so much more attractive than any of these other girls with whom he was every day in contact.

How unfair and ridiculous for the Griffiths to insist that a man in his position should not associate with a girl such as Roberta, for instance, and just because she worked in the mill. He might not even make friends with her and bring her to some such lake as this or visit her in her little home on account of that. And yet he could not go with others more worthy of him, perhaps, for lack of means or contacts. And besides she was so attractive—very—and especially enticing to him. He could see her now as she worked with her swift, graceful movements at her machine. Her shapely arms and hands, her smooth skin and her bright eyes as she smiled up at him. And his thoughts were played over by exactly the same emotions that swept him so regularly at the factory. For poor or not—a working girl by misfortune only—he could see how he could be very happy with her if only he did not need to marry her. For now his ambitions toward marriage had been firmly magnetized by the world to which the Griffiths belonged. And yet his desires were most colorfully inflamed by her. If only he might venture to talk to her more—to walk home with her some day from the

mill—to bring her out here to this lake on a Saturday or Sunday, and row about—just to idle and dream with her.

He rounded a point studded with a clump of trees and bushes and covering a shallow where were scores of water lilies afloat, their large leaves resting flat upon the still water of the lake. And on the bank to the left was a girl standing and looking at them. She had her hat off and one hand to her eyes for she was facing the sun and was looking down in the water. Her lips were parted in careless inquiry. She was very pretty, he thought, as he paused in his paddling to look at her. The sleeves of a pale blue waist came only to her elbows. And a darker blue skirt of flannel reconveyed to him the trimness of her figure. It wasn't Roberta! It couldn't be! Yes, it was!

Almost before he had decided, he was quite beside her, some twenty feet from the shore, and was looking up at her, his face lit by the radiance of one who had suddenly, and beyond his belief, realized a dream. And as though he were a pleasant apparition suddenly evoked out of nothing and nowhere, a poetic effort taking form out of smoke or vibrant energy, she in turn stood staring down at him, her lips unable to resist the wavy line of beauty that a happy mood always brought to them.

"My, Miss Alden! It is you, isn't it?" he called. "I was wondering whether it was. I couldn't be sure from out there."

"Why, yes it is," she laughed, puzzled, and again just the least bit abashed by the reality of him. For in spite of her obvious pleasure at seeing him again, only thinly repressed for the first moment or two, she was on the instant beginning to be troubled by her thoughts in regard to him—the difficulties that contact with him seemed to prognosticate. For this meant contact and friendship, maybe, and she was no longer in any mood to resist him, whatever people might think. And yet here was her friend, Grace Marr. Would she want her to know of Clyde and her interest in him? She was troubled. And yet she could not resist smiling and looking at him in a frank and welcoming way. She had been thinking of him so much and wishing for him in some happy, secure, commendable way. And now here he was. And there could be nothing more innocent than his presence here—nor hers.

"Just out for a walk?" he forced himself to say, although, because of his delight and his fear of her really, he felt not a little embarrassed now that she was directly before him. At the same time he added, recalling that she had been looking so intently at the water: "You want some of these water lilies? Is that what you're looking for?"

"Uh, huh," she replied, still smiling and looking directly at him, for the sight of his dark hair blown by the wind, the pale blue outing shirt he wore open at the neck, his sleeves rolled up and the yellow paddle held by him above the handsome blue boat, quite thrilled her. If only she could win such a youth for her very own self—just hers and no one else's in the whole world. It seemed as though this would be paradise—that if she could have him she would never want anything else in all the world. And here at her very feet he sat now in this bright canoe on this clear July afternoon in this summery world—so new and pleasing to her. And now he was laughing up at her so directly and admiringly. Her girl friend was far in the rear somewhere looking for daisies. Could she? Should she?

"I was seeing if there was any way to get out to any of them," she continued a little nervously, a tremor almost revealing itself in her voice. "I haven't seen any before just here on this side."

"I'll get you all you want," he exclaimed briskly and gayly. "You just stay where you are. I'll bring them." But then, bethinking him of how much more lovely it would be if she were to get in with him, he added: "But see here—why don't you get in here with me? There's plenty of room and I can take you anywhere you want to go. There's lots nicer lilies up the lake here a little way and on the other side too. I saw hundreds of them over there just beyond that island."

Roberta looked. And as she did, another canoe paddled by, holding a youth of about Clyde's years and a girl no older than herself. She wore a white dress and a pink hat and the canoe was green. And far across the water at the point of the very island about which Clyde was talking was another canoe—bright yellow with a boy and a girl in that. She was thinking she would like to get in without her companion, if possible—with her, if need be. She wanted so much to have him all to herself. If she had only come out here alone. For if Grace Marr were included, she would know and later talk, maybe, or think, if she heard anything else in regard to them ever. And yet if she did not, there was the fear that he might not like her any more—might even come to dislike her or give up being interested in her, and that would be dreadful.

She stood staring and thinking, and Clyde, troubled and pained by her doubt on this occasion and his own loneliness and desire for her, suddenly called: "Oh, please don't say no. Just get in, won't you? You'll like it. I want you to. Then we can find all the lilies you want. I can let you out anywhere you want to get out—in ten minutes if you want to."

She marked the "I want you to." It soothed and strengthened her. He had no desire to take any advantage of her as she could see.

"But I have my friend with me here," she exclaimed almost sadly and dubiously, for she still wanted to go alone—never in her life had she wanted any one less than Grace Marr at this moment. Why had she brought her? She wasn't so very pretty and Clyde might not like her, and that might spoil the occasion. "Besides," she added almost in the same breath and with many thoughts fighting her, "maybe I'd better not. Is it safe?"

"Oh, yes, but maybe you better had," laughed Clyde seeing that she was yielding. "It's perfectly safe," he added eagerly. Then maneuvering the canoe next to the bank, which was a foot above the water, and laying hold of a root to hold it still, he said: "Of course you won't be in any danger. Call your friend then, if you want to, and I'll row the two of you. There's room for two and there are lots of water lilies everywhere over there." He nodded toward the east side of the lake.

Roberta could no longer resist and seized an overhanging branch by which to steady herself. At the same time she began to call: "Oh, Gray-ace! Gray-ace! Where are you?" for she had at last decided that it was best to include her.

A far-off voice as quickly answered: "Hello-o! What do you want?"

"Come up here. Come on. I got something I want to tell you."

"Oh, no, you come on down here. The daisies are just wonderful."

"No, you come on up here. There's some one here that wants to take us boating." She intended to call this loudly, but somehow her voice failed and her friend went on gathering flowers. Roberta frowned. She did not know just what to do. "Oh, very well, then," she suddenly decided, and straightening up added: "We can row down to where she is, I guess."

And Clyde, delighted, exclaimed: "Oh, that's just fine. Sure. Do get in. We'll pick these here first and then if she hasn't come, I'll paddle down nearer to where she is. Just step square in the center and that will balance it."

He was leaning back and looking up at her and Roberta was looking nervously and yet warmly into his eyes. Actually it was as though she were suddenly diffused with joy, enveloped in a rosy mist.

She balanced one foot. "Will it be perfectly safe?"

"Sure, sure," emphasized Clyde. "I'll hold it safe. Just

take hold of that branch there and steady yourself by that." He held the boat very still as she stepped. Then, as the canoe careened slightly to one side, she dropped to the cushioned seat with a little cry. It was like that of a baby to Clyde.

"It's all right," he reassured her. "Just sit in the center there. It won't tip over. Gee, but this is funny. I can't make it out quite. You know just as I was coming around that point I was thinking of you—how maybe you might like to come out to a place like this sometime. And now here you are and here I am, and it all happened just like that." He waved his hand and snapped his fingers.

And Roberta, fascinated by this confession and yet a little frightened by it, added: "Is that so?" She was thinking of her own thoughts in regard to him.

"Yes, and what's more," added Clyde, "I've been thinking of you all day, really. That's the truth. I was wishing I might see you somewhere this morning and bring you out here."

"Oh, now, Mr. Griffiths. You know you don't mean that," pleaded Roberta, fearful lest this sudden contact should take too intimate and sentimental a turn too quickly. She scarcely liked that because she was afraid of him and herself, and now she looked at him, trying to appear a little cold or at least disinterested, but it was a very weak effort.

"That's the truth, though, just the same," insisted Clyde.

"Well, I think it is beautiful myself," admitted Roberta. "I've been out here, too, several times now. My friend and I." Clyde was once more delighted. She was smiling now and full of wonder.

"Oh, have you?" he exclaimed, and there was more talk as to why he liked to come out and how he had learned to swim here. "And to think I turned in here and there you were on the bank, looking at those water lilies. Wasn't that queer? I almost fell out of the boat. I don't think I ever saw you look as pretty as you did just now standing there."

"Oh, now, Mr. Griffiths," again pleaded Roberta cautiously. "You mustn't begin that way. I'll be afraid you're a dreadful flatterer. I'll have to think you are if you say anything like that so quickly."

Clyde once more gazed at her weakly, and she smiled because she thought he was more handsome than ever. But what would he think, she added to herself, if she were to tell him that just before he came around that point she was thinking of him too, and wishing that he were there with her, and not Grace. And how they might sit and talk, and hold hands perhaps. He might

even put his arms around her waist, and she might let him. That would be terrible, as some people here would see it, she knew. And it would never do for him to know that—never. That would be too intimate—too bold. But just the same it was so. Yet what would these people here in Lycurgus think of her and him now if they should see her, letting him paddle her about in this canoe! He a factory manager and she an employee in his department. The conclusion! The scandal, maybe, even. And yet Grace Marr was along—or soon would be. And she could explain to her—surely. He was out rowing and knew her, and why shouldn't he help her get some lilies if he wanted to? It was almost unavoidable—this present situation, wasn't it?

Already Clyde had maneuvered the canoe around so that they were now among the water lilies. And as he talked, having laid his paddle aside, he had been reaching over and pulling them up, tossing them with their long, wet stems at her feet as she lay reclining in the seat, one hand over the side of the canoe in the water, as she had seen other girls holding theirs. And for the moment her thoughts were allayed and modified by the beauty of his head and arms and the tousled hair that now fell over his eyes. How handsome he was!

CHAPTER XVI

THE outcome of that afternoon was so wonderful for both that for days thereafter neither could cease thinking about it or marveling that anything so romantic and charming should have brought them together so intimately when both were considering that it was not wise for either to know the other any better than employee and superior.

After a few moments of badinage in the boat in which he had talked about the beauty of the lilies and how glad he was to get them for her, they picked up her friend, Grace, and eventually returned to the boathouse.

Once on the land again there developed not a little hesitation on her part as well as his as to how farther to proceed, for they were confronted by the problem of returning into Lycurgus together. As Roberta saw it, it would not look right and might create talk. And on his part, he was thinking of Gilbert and other people he knew. The trouble that might come of it. What Gilbert would say if he did hear. And so both he and she, as well as Grace, were dubious on the instant about the wisdom of riding back together. Grace's own reputation, as well as the fact that she knew Clyde was not interested in her, piqued her. And Roberta, realizing this from her manner, said: "What do you think we had better do, excuse ourselves?"

At once Roberta tried to think just how they could extricate themselves gracefully without offending Clyde. Personally she was so enchanted that had she been alone she would have preferred to have ridden back with him. But with Grace here and in this cautious mood, never. She must think up some excuse.

And at the same time, Clyde was wondering just how he was to do now—ride in with them and brazenly face the possibility of being seen by some one who might carry the news to Gilbert Griffiths or evade doing so on some pretext or other. He could think of none, however, and was about to turn and accompany them to the car when the young electrician, Shurlock, who lived in the Newton household and who had been on the balcony of the pavilion, hailed them. He was with a friend who had a small car, and they were ready to return to the city.

"Well, here's luck," he exclaimed. "How are you, Miss Alden? How do you do, Miss Marr? You two don't happen

to be going our way, do you? If you are, we can take you in with us."

Not only Roberta but Clyde heard. And at once she was about to say that, since it was a little late and she and Grace were scheduled to attend church services with the Newtons, it would be more convenient for them to return this way. She was, however, half hoping that Shurlock would invite Clyde and that he would accept. But on his doing so, Clyde instantly refused. He explained that he had decided to stay out a little while longer. And so Roberta left him with a look that conveyed clearly enough the gratitude and delight she felt. They had had such a good time. And he in turn, in spite of many qualms as to the wisdom of all this, fell to brooding on how sad it was that just he and Roberta might not have remained here for hours longer. And immediately after they had gone, he returned to the city alone.

The next morning he was keener than ever to see Roberta again. And although the peculiarly exposed nature of the work at the factory made it impossible for him to demonstrate his feelings, still by the swift and admiring and seeking smiles that played over his face and blazed in his eyes, she knew that he was as enthusiastic, if not more so, as on the night before. And on her part, although she felt that a crisis of some sort was impending, and in spite of the necessity of a form of secrecy which she resented, she could not refrain from giving him a warm and quite yielding glance in return. The wonder of his being interested in her! The wonder and the thrill!

Clyde decided at once that his attentions were still welcome. Also that he might risk saying something to her, supposing that a suitable opportunity offered. And so, after waiting an hour and seeing two fellow workers leave from either side of her, he seized the occasion to drift near and to pick up one of the collars she had just stamped, saying, as though talking about that: "I was awfully sorry to have to leave you last night. I wish we were out there again to-day instead of here, just you and me, don't you?"

Roberta turned, conscious that now was the time to decide whether she would encourage or discourage any attention on his part. At the same time she was almost faintingly eager to accept his attentions regardless of the problem in connection with them. His eyes! His hair! His hands! And then instead of rebuking or chilling him in any way, she only looked, but with eyes too weak and melting to mean anything less than yielding and uncertainty. Clyde saw that she was hopelessly and help-

lessly drawn to him, as indeed he was to her. On the instant he was resolved to say something more, when he could, as to where they could meet when no one was along, for it was plain that she was no more anxious to be observed than he was. He well knew more sharply to-day than ever before that he was treading on dangerous ground.

He began to make mistakes in his calculations, to feel that, with her so near him, he was by no means concentrating on the various tasks before him. She was too enticing, too compelling in so many ways to him. There was something so warm and gay and welcome about her that he felt that if he could persuade her to love him he would be among the most fortunate of men. Yet there was that rule, and although on the lake the day before he had been deciding that his position here was by no means as satisfactory as it should be, still with Roberta in it, as now it seemed she well might be, would it not be much more delightful for him to stay? Could he not, for the time being at least, endure the further indifference of the Griffiths? And who knows, might they not yet become interested in him as a suitable social figure if only he did nothing to offend them? And yet here he was attempting to do exactly the thing he had been forbidden to do. What kind of an injunction was this, anyhow, wherewith Gilbert had enjoined him? If he could come to some understanding with her, perhaps she would meet him in some clandestine way and thus obviate all possibility of criticism.

It was thus that Clyde, seated at his desk or walking about, was thinking. For now his mind, even in the face of his duties, was almost entirely engaged by her, and he could think of nothing else. He had decided to suggest that they meet for the first time, if she would, in a small park which was just west of the first outlying resort on the Mohawk. But throughout the day, so close to each other did the girls work, he had no opportunity to communicate with her. Indeed noontime came and he went below to his lunch, returning a little early in the hope of finding her sufficiently detached to permit him to whisper that he wished to see her somewhere. But she was surrounded by others at the time and so the entire afternoon went by without a single opportunity.

However, as he was going out, he bethought him that if he should chance to meet her alone somewhere in the street, he would venture to speak to her. For she wanted him to—that he knew, regardless of what she might say at any time. And he must find some way that would appear as accidental and hence as innocent to her as to others. But as the whistle blew and

she left the building she was joined by another girl, and he was left to think of some other way.

That same evening, however, instead of lingering about the Peyton house or going to a moving picture theater, as he so often did now, or walking alone somewhere in order to allay his unrest and loneliness, he chose now instead to seek out the home of Roberta on Taylor Street. It was not a pleasing house, as he now decided, not nearly so attractive as Mrs. Cuppy's or the house in which he now dwelt. It was too old and brown, the neighborhood too nondescript, if conservative. But the lights in different rooms glowing at this early hour gave it a friendly and genial look. And the few trees in front were pleasant. What was Roberta doing now? Why couldn't she have waited for him in the factory? Why couldn't she sense now that he was outside and come out? He wished intensely that in some way he could make her feel that he was out here, and so cause her to come out. But she didn't. On the contrary, he observed Mr. Shurlock issue forth and disappear toward Central Avenue. And, after that, pedestrian after pedestrian making their way out of different houses along the street and toward Central, which caused him to walk briskly about the block in order to avoid being seen. At the same time he sighed often, because it was such a fine night—a full moon rising about nine-thirty and hanging heavy and yellow over the chimney tops. He was so lonely.

But at ten, the moon becoming too bright, and no Roberta appearing, he decided to leave. It was not wise to be hanging about here. But the night being so fine he resented the thought of his room and instead walked up and down Wykeagy Avenue, looking at the fine houses there—his uncle Samuel's among them. Now, all their occupants were away at their summer places. The houses were dark. And Sondra Finchley and Bertine Cranston and all that company—what were they doing on a night like this? Where dancing? Where speeding? Where loving? It was so hard to be poor, not to have money and position and to be able to do in life exactly as you wished.

And the next morning, more eager than usual, he was out of Mrs. Peyton's by six-forty-five, anxious to find some way of renewing his attentions to Roberta. For there was that crowd of factory workers that proceeded north along Central Avenue. And she would be a unit in it, of course, at about 7.10. But his trip to the factory was fruitless. For, after swallowing a cup of coffee at one of the small restaurants near the post-office and walking the length of Central Avenue toward the mill, and

pausing at a cigar store to see if Roberta should by any chance come along alone, he was rewarded by the sight of her with Grace Marr again. What a wretched, crazy world this was, he at once decided, and how difficult it was in this miserable town for anyone to meet anyone else alone. Everyone, nearly, knew everyone else. Besides, Roberta knew that he was trying to get a chance to talk to her. Why shouldn't she walk alone then? He had looked at her enough yesterday. And yet here she was walking with Grace Marr and appeared seemingly contented. What was the matter with her anyhow?

By the time he reached the factory he was very sour. But the sight of Roberta taking her place at her bench and tossing him a genial "good morning" with a cheerful smile, caused him to feel better and that all was not lost.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon and a lull due to the afternoon heat, the fag of steadily continued work, and the flare of reflected light from the river outside was over all. The tap, tap, tap of metal stamps upon scores of collars at once—nearly always slightly audible above the hum and whirr of the sewing machines beyond was, if anything, weaker than usual. And there was Ruza Nikoforitch, Hoda Petkanas, Martha Bordaloue, Angelina Pitti and Lena Schlict, all joining in a song called "Sweethearts" which some one had started. And Roberta, perpetually conscious of Clyde's eyes, as well as his mood, was thinking how long it would be before he would come around with some word in regard to something. For she wished him to—and because of his whispered words of the day before, she was sure that it would not be long, because he would not be able to resist it. His eyes the night before had told her that. Yet because of the impediments of this situation she knew that he must be having a difficult time thinking of any way by which he could say anything to her. And still at certain moments she was glad, for there were such moments when she felt she needed the security which the presence of so many girls gave her.

And as she thought of all this, stamping at her desk along with the others, she suddenly discovered that a bundle of collars which she had already stamped as sixteens were not of that size but smaller. She looked at it quickly and nervously, then decided that there was but one thing to do—lay the bundle aside and await comment from one of the foremen, including Clyde, or take it directly to him now—really the better way, because it prevented any of the foremen seeing it before he did. That was what all the girls did when they made mistakes of any kind.

And all trained girls were supposed to catch all possible errors of that kind.

And yet now and in the face of all her very urgent desires she hesitated, for this would take her direct to Clyde and give him the opportunity he was seeking. But, more terrifying, it was giving her the opportunity she was seeking. She wavered between loyalty to Clyde as a superintendent, loyalty to her old conventions as opposed to her new and dominating desire and her repressed wish to have Clyde speak to her—then went over with the bundle and laid it on his desk. But her hands, as she did so, trembled. Her face was white—her throat taut. At the moment, as it chanced, he was almost vainly trying to calculate the scores of the different girls from the stubs laid before him, and was having a hard time of it because his mind was not on what he was doing. And then he looked up. And there was Roberta bending toward him. His nerves became very taut, his throat and lips dry, for here and now was his opportunity. And, as he could see, Roberta was almost suffocating from the strain which her daring and self-deception was putting upon her nerves and heart.

"There's been a distake" (she meant to say mistake) "in regard to this bundle upstairs," she began. "I didn't notice it either until I'd stamped nearly all of them. They're fifteen-and-a-half and I've stamped nearly all of them sixteen. I'm sorry."

Clyde noticed, as she said this, that she was trying to smile a little and appear calm, but her cheeks were quite blanched and her hand, particularly the one that held the bundle, trembled. On the instant he realized that although loyalty and order were bringing her with this mistake to him, still there was more than that to it. In a weak, frightened, and yet love-driven way, she was courting him, giving him the opportunity he was seeking, wishing him to take advantage of it. And he, embarrassed and shaken for the moment by this sudden visitation, was still heartened and hardened into a kind of effrontery and gallantry such as he had not felt as yet in regard to her. She was seeking him—that was plain. She was interested, and clever enough to make the occasion which permitted him to speak. Wonderful! The sweetness of her daring.

"Oh, that's all right," he said, pretending a courage and a daring in regard to her which he did not feel even now. "I'll just send them down to the wash room and then we'll see if we can't restamp them. It's not our mistake, really."

He smiled most warmly and she met his look with a repressed

smile of her own, already turning and fearing that she had manifested too clearly what had brought her.

"But don't go," he added quickly. "I want to ask you something. I've been trying to get a word with you ever since Sunday. I want you to meet me somewhere, will you? There's a rule here that says a head of a department can't have anything to do with a girl who works for him—outside I mean. But I want you to see me just the same, won't you? You know," and he smiled winsomely and coaxingly into her eyes, "I've been just nearly crazy over you ever since you came in here and Sunday made it worse. And now I'm not going to let any old rule come between me and you, if I can help it. Will you?"

"Oh, I don't know whether I can do that or not," replied Roberta, who, now that she had succeeded in accomplishing what she had wished, was becoming terrorized by her own daring. She began looking around nervously and feeling that every eye in the room must be upon her. "I live with Mr. and Mrs. Newton, my friend's sister and brother-in-law, you know, and they're very strict. It isn't the same as if—" She was going to add "I was home" but Clyde interrupted her.

"Oh, now please don't say no, will you? Please don't. I want to see you. I don't want to cause you any trouble, that's all. Otherwise I'd be glad to come round to your house. You know how it is."

"Oh, no, you mustn't do that," cautioned Roberta. "Not yet anyhow." She was so confused that quite unconsciously she was giving Clyde to understand that she was expecting him to come around some time later.

"Well," smiled Clyde, who could see that she was yielding in part. "We could just walk out near the end of some street here—that street you live in, if you wish. There are no houses out there. Or there's a little park—Mohawk—just west of Dreamland on the Mohawk Street line. It's right on the river. You might come out there. I could meet you where the car stops. Will you do that?"

"Oh, I'd be afraid to do that I think—go so far, I mean. I never did anything like that before." She looked so innocent and frank as she said this that Clyde was quite carried away by the sweetness of her. And to think he was making a clandestine appointment with her. "I'm almost afraid to go anywhere here alone, you know. People talk so here, they say, and some one would be sure to see me. But——"

"Yes, but what?"

"I'm afraid I'm staying too long at your desk here, don't you

think?" She actually gasped as she said it. And Clyde realizing the openness of it, although there was really nothing very unusual about it, now spoke quickly and forcefully.

"Well, then, how about the end of that street you live in? Couldn't you come down there for just a little while to-night—a half hour or so, maybe?"

"Oh, I couldn't make it to-night, I think—not so soon. I'll have to see first, you know. Arrange, that is. But another day." She was so excited and troubled by this great adventure of hers that her face, like Clyde's at times, changed from a half smile to a half frown without her realizing that it was registering these changes.

"Well, then, how about Wednesday night at eight-thirty or nine? Couldn't you do that? Please, now."

Roberta considered most sweetly, nervously. Clyde was enormously fascinated by her manner at the moment, for she looked around, conscious, or so she seemed, that she was being observed and that her stay here for a first visit was very long.

"I suppose I'd better be going back to my work now," she replied without really answering him.

"Wait a minute," pled Clyde. "We haven't fixed on the time for Wednesday. Aren't you going to meet me? Make it nine or eight-thirty, or any time you want to. I'll be there waiting for you after eight if you wish. Will you?"

"All right, then, say eight-thirty or between eight-thirty and nine, if I can. Is that all right? I'll come if I can, you know, and if anything does happen I'll tell you the next morning, you see." She flushed and then looked around once more, a foolish, flustered look, then hurried back to her bench, fairly tingling from head to toe, and looking as guilty as though she had been caught red-handed in some dreadful crime. And Clyde at his desk was almost choking with excitement. The wonder of her agreeing, of his talking to her like that, of her venturing to make a date with him at all here in Lycurgus, where he was so well-known! Thrilling!

For her part, she was thinking how wonderful it would be just to walk and talk with him in the moonlight, to feel the pressure of his arm and hear his soft appealing voice.

CHAPTER XVII

IT was quite dark when Roberta stole out on Wednesday night to meet Clyde. But before that what qualms and meditations in the face of her willingness and her agreement to do so. For not only was it difficult for her to overcome her own mental scruples within, but in addition there was all the trouble in connection with the commonplace and religious and narrow atmosphere in which she found herself imbedded at the Newtons. For since coming here she had scarcely gone anywhere without Grace Marr. Besides on this occasion—a thing she had forgotten in talking to Clyde—she had agreed to go with the Newtons and Grace to the Gideon Baptist Church, where a Wednesday prayer meeting was to be followed by a social with games, cake, tea and ice cream.

In consequence she was troubled severely as to how to manage, until it came back to her that a day or two before Mr. Liggett, in noting how rapid and efficient she was, had observed that at any time she wanted to learn one phase of the stitching operations going on in the next room, he would have her taken in hand by Mrs. Braley, who would teach her. And now that Clyde's invitation and this church affair fell on the same night, she decided to say that she had an appointment with Mrs. Braley at her home. Only, as she also decided, she would wait until just before dinner Wednesday and then say that Mrs. Braley had invited her to come to her house. Then she could see Clyde. And by the time the Newtons and Grace returned she could be back. Oh, how it would feel to have him talk to her—say again as he did in the boat that he never had seen any one look so pretty as she did standing on the bank and looking for water lilies. Many, many thoughts—vague, dreadful, colorful, came to her—how and where they might go—be—do—from now on, if only she could arrange to be friends with him without harm to her or him. If need be, she now decided, she could resign from the factory and get a place somewhere else—a change which would absolve Clyde from any responsibility in regard to her.

There was, however, another mental as well as emotional phase in regard to all this and that related to her clothes. For

since coming to Lycurgus she had learned that the more intelligent girls here dressed better than did those about Biltz and Trippetts Mills. At the same time she had been sending a fair portion of her money to her mother—sufficient to have equipped her exceptionally well, as she now realized, had she retained it. But now that Clyde was swaying her so greatly she was troubled about her looks, and on the evening after her conversation with him at the mill, she had gone through her small wardrobe, fixing upon a soft blue hat which Clyde had not yet seen, together with a checkered blue and white flannel skirt and a pair of white canvas shoes purchased the previous summer at Biltz. Her plan was to wait until the Newtons and Grace had departed for church and then swiftly dress and leave.

At eight-thirty, when night had finally fallen, she went east along Taylor to Central Avenue, then by a circuitous route made her way west again to the trysting place. And Clyde was already there. Against an old wooden fence that enclosed a five-acre cornfield, he was leaning and looking back toward the interesting little city, the lights in so many of the homes of which were aglow through the trees. The air was laden with spices—the mingled fragrance of many grasses and flowers. There was a light wind stirring in the long swords of the corn at his back—in the leaves of the trees overhead. And there were stars—the big dipper and the little dipper and the milky way—sidereal phenomena which his mother had pointed out to him long ago.

And he was thinking how different was his position here to what it had been in Kansas City. There he had been so nervous in regard to Hortense Briggs or any girl, really—afraid almost to say a word to any of them. Whereas here, and especially since he had had charge of this stamping room, he had seemed to become aware of the fact that he was more attractive than he had ever thought he was before. Also that the girls were attracted to him and that he was not so much afraid of them. The eyes of Roberta herself showed him this day how much she was drawn to him. She was his girl. And when she came, he would put his arms around her and kiss her. And she would not be able to resist him.

He stood listening, dreaming and watching, the rustling corn behind him stirring an old recollection in him, when suddenly he saw her coming. She looked trim and brisk and yet nervous, and paused at the street end and looked about like a frightened and cautious animal. At once Clyde hurried forward toward her and called softly: "Hello. Gee, it's nice to have you meet me. Did you have any trouble?" He was thinking how much

more pleasing she was than either Hortense Briggs or Rita Dickerman, the one so calculating, the other so sensually free and indiscriminate.

"Did I have any trouble? Oh, didn't I though?" And at once she plunged into a full and picturesque account, not only of the mistake in regard to the Newtons' church night and her engagement with them, but of a determination on the part of Grace Marr not to go to the church social without her, and how she had to fib, oh, so terribly, about going over to Mrs. Braley's to learn to stitch—a Liggett-Roberta development of which Clyde had heard nothing so far and concerning which he was intensely curious, because at once it raised the thought that already Liggett might be intending to remove her from under his care. He proceeded to question her about that before he would let her go on with her story, an interest which Roberta noticed and because of which she was very pleased.

"But I can't stay very long, you know," she explained briskly and warmly at the first opportunity, the while Clyde laid hold of her arm and turned toward the river, which was to the north and untenanted this far out. "The Baptist Church socials never last much beyond ten-thirty or eleven, and they'll be back soon. So I'll have to manage to be back before they are."

Then she gave many reasons why it would be unwise for her to be out after ten, reasons which annoyed yet convinced Clyde by their wisdom. He had been hoping to keep her out longer. But seeing that the time was to be brief, he was all the keener for a closer contact with her now, and fell to complimenting her on her pretty hat and cape and how becoming they were. At once he tried putting his arm about her waist, but feeling this to be a too swift advance she removed his arm, or tried to, saying in the softest and most coaxing voice "Now, now—that's not nice, is it? Can't you just hold my arm or let me hold yours?" But he noted, once she persuaded him to disengage her waist, she took his arm in a clinging, snuggling embrace and measured her stride to his. On the instant he was thinking how natural and unaffected her manner was now that the ice between them had been broken.

And how she went on babbling! She liked Lycurgus, only she thought it was the most religious town she had ever been in—worse than Biltz or Trippetts Mills that way. And then she had to explain to Clyde what Biltz and Trippetts Mills were like—and her home—a very little, for she did not care to talk about that. And then back to the Newtons and Grace Marr and how they watched her every move. Clyde was thinking as

she talked how different she was from Hortense Briggs or Rita, or any other girl he had ever known—so much more simple and confiding—not in any way mushy as was Rita, or brash or vain or pretentious, as was Hortense, and yet really as pretty and so much sweeter. He could not help thinking if she were smartly dressed how sweet she would be. And again he was wondering what she would think of him and his attitude toward Hortense in contrast to his attitude toward her now, if she knew.

"You know," he said at the very first opportunity, "I've been trying to talk to you ever since you came to work at the factory but you see how very watchful every one is. They're the limit. They told me when I came up there that I mustn't interest myself in any girl working there and so I tried not to. But I just couldn't help this, could I?" He squeezed her arm affectionately, then stopped suddenly and, disengaging his arm from hers, put both his about her. "You know, Roberta, I'm crazy about you. I really am. I think you're the dearest, sweetest thing. Oh, say! Do you mind my telling you? Ever since you showed up there, I haven't been able to sleep, nearly. That's the truth—honest it is. I think and think of you. You've got such nice eyes and hair. To-night you look just too cute—lovely, I think. Oh, Roberta," suddenly he caught her face between his two hands and kissed her, before really she could evade him. Then having done this he held her while she resisted him, although it was almost impossible for her to do so. Instead she felt as though she wanted to put her arms around him or have him hold her tight, and this mood in regard to him and herself puzzled and troubled her. It was awful. What would people think—say—if they knew? She was a bad girl, really, and yet she wanted to be this way—near him—now as never before.

"Oh, you mustn't, Mr. Griffiths," she pleaded. "You really mustn't, you know. Please. Some one might see us. I think I hear some one coming. Please, now." She looked about quite frightened, apparently, while Clyde laughed ecstatically. Life had presented him a delicious sweet at last. "You know I never did anything like this before," she went on. "Honest, I didn't. Please. It's only because you said——"

Clyde was pressing her close, not saying anything in reply—his pale face and dark hungry eyes held very close to hers. He kissed her again and again despite her protests, her little mouth and chin and cheeks seeming too beautiful—too irresistible—then murmured pleadingly, for he was too overcome to speak vigorously.

"Oh, Roberta, dearest, please, please, say that you love me.

Please do! I know that you do, Roberta. I can tell. Please, tell me now. I'm so crazy about you. We have so little time."

He kissed her again upon the cheek and mouth, and suddenly he felt her relax. She stood quite still and unresisting in his arms. He felt a wonder of something—he could not tell what. All of a sudden he felt tears upon her face, her head sunk to his shoulder, and then he heard her say: "Yes, yes, yes. I do love you. Yes, yes. I do. I do."

There was a sob—half of misery, half of delight—in her voice and Clyde caught that. He was so touched by her honesty and simplicity that tears sprang to his own eyes. "It's all right, Roberta. It's all right. Please don't cry. Oh, I think you're so sweet. I do. I do, Roberta."

He looked up and before him in the east over the low roofs of the city was the thinnest, yellowest topmost arc of the rising July moon. It seemed at the moment as though life had given him all—all—that he could possibly ask of it.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE culmination of this meeting was but the prelude, as both Clyde and Roberta realized, to a series of contacts and rejoicings which were to extend over an indefinite period. They had found love. They were deliciously happy, whatever the problems attending its present realization might be. But the ways and means of continuing with it were a different matter. For not only was her connection with the Newtons a bar to any normal procedure in so far as Clyde was concerned, but Grace Marr herself offered a distinct and separate problem. Far more than Roberta she was chained, not only by the defect of poor looks, but by the narrow teachings and domestic training of her early social and religious life. Yet she wanted to be gay and free, too. And in Roberta, who, while gay and boastful at times, was still well within the conventions that chained Grace, she imagined that she saw one who was not so bound. And so it was that she clung to her closely and as Roberta saw it a little wearisomely. She imagined that they could exchange ideas and jests and confidences in regard to the love life and their respective dreams without injury to each other. And to date this was her one solace in an otherwise gray world.

But Roberta, even before the arrival of Clyde in her life, did not want to be so clung to. It was a bore. And afterwards she developed an inhibition in regard to him where Grace was concerned. For she not only knew that Grace would resent this sudden desertion, but also that she had no desire to face out within herself the sudden and revolutionary moods which now possessed her. Having at once met and loved him, she was afraid to think what, if anything, she proposed to permit herself to do in regard to him. Were not such contacts between the classes banned here? She knew they were. Hence she did not care to talk about him at all.

In consequence on Monday evening following the Sunday on the lake when Grace had inquired most gayly and familiarly after Clyde, Roberta had as instantly decided not to appear nearly as interested in him as Grace might already be imagining. Accordingly, she said little other than that he was very pleasant to her and had inquired after Grace, a remark which caused the latter to eye her slyly and to wonder if she were really telling

what had happened since. "He was so very friendly I was beginning to think he was struck on you."

"Oh, what nonsense!" Roberta replied shrewdly, and a bit alarmed. "Why, he wouldn't look at me. Besides, there's a rule of the company that doesn't permit him to, as long as I work there."

This last, more than anything else, served to allay Grace's notions in regard to Clyde and Roberta, for she was of that conventional turn of mind which would scarcely permit her to think of any one infringing upon a company rule. Nevertheless Roberta was nervous lest Grace should be associating her and Clyde in her mind in some clandestine way, and she decided to be doubly cautious in regard to Clyde—to feign a distance she did not feel.

But all this was preliminary to troubles and strains and fears which had nothing to do with what had gone before, but took their rise from difficulties which sprang up immediately afterwards. For once she had come to this complete emotional understanding with Clyde, she saw no way of meeting him except in this very clandestine way and that so very rarely and uncertainly that she could not say when there was likely to be another meeting.

"You see, it's this way," she explained to Clyde when, a few evenings later, she had managed to steal out for an hour and they walked from the region at the end of Taylor Street down to the Mohawk, where were some open fields and a low bank rising above the pleasant river. "The Newtons never go any place much without inviting me. And even if they didn't, Grace'd never go unless I went along. It's just because we were together so much in Trippetts Mills that she feels that way, as though I were a part of the family. But now it's different, and yet I don't see how I am going to get out of it so soon. I don't know where to say I'm going or whom I am going with."

"I know that, honey," he replied softly and sweetly. "That's all true enough. But how is that going to help us now? You can't expect me to get along with just looking at you in the factory, either, can you?"

He gazed at her so solemnly and yearningly that she was moved by her sympathy for him, and in order to assuage his depression added: "No, I don't want you to do that, dear. You know I don't. But what am I to do?" She laid a soft and pleading hand on the back of one of Clyde's thin, long and nervous ones.

"I'll tell you what, though," she went on after a period of

reflection, "I have a sister living in Homer, New York. That's about thirty-five miles north of here. I might say I was going up there some Saturday afternoon or Sunday. She's been writing me to come up, but I hadn't thought of it before. But I might go—that is—I might——"

"Oh, why not do that?" exclaimed Clyde eagerly. "That's fine! A good idea!"

"Let me see," she added, ignoring his exclamation. "If I remember right you have to go to Fonda first, then change cars there. But I could leave here any time on the trolley and there are only two trains a day from Fonda, one at two, and one at seven on Saturday. So I might leave here any time before two, you see, and then if I didn't make the two o'clock train, it would be all right, wouldn't it? I could go on the seven. And you could be over there, or meet me on the way, just so no one here saw us. Then I could go on and you could come back. I could arrange that with Agnes, I'm sure. I would have to write her."

"How about all the time between then and now, though?" he queried peevishly. "It's a long time till then, you know."

"Well, I'll have to see what I can think of, but I'm not sure, dear. I'll have to see. And you think too. But I ought to be going back now," she added nervously. She at once arose, causing Clyde to rise, too, and consult his watch, thereby discovering that it was already near ten.

"But what about us!" he continued persistently. "Why couldn't you pretend next Sunday that you're going to some other church than yours and meet me somewhere instead? Would they have to know?"

At once Clyde noted Roberta's face darken slightly, for here he was encroaching upon something that was still too closely identified with her early youth and convictions to permit infringement.

"Hump, uh," she replied quite solemnly. "I wouldn't want to do that. I wouldn't feel right about it. And it wouldn't be right, either."

Immediately Clyde sensed that he was treading on dangerous ground and withdrew the suggestion because he did not care to offend or frighten her in any way. "Oh, well. Just as you say. I only thought since you don't seem to be able to think of any other way."

"No, no, dear," she pleaded softly, because she noted that he felt that she might be offended. "It's all right, only I wouldn't want to do that. I couldn't."

Clyde shook his head. A recollection of his own youthful inhibitions caused him to feel that perhaps it was not right for him to have suggested it.

They returned in the direction of Taylor Street without, apart from the proposed trip to Fonda, either having hit upon any definite solution. Instead, after kissing her again and again and just before letting her go, the best he could suggest was that both were to try and think of some way by which they could meet before, if possible. And she, after throwing her arms about his neck for a moment, ran east along Taylor Street, her little figure swaying in the moonlight.

However, apart from another evening meeting which was made possible by Roberta's announcing a second engagement with Mrs. Braley, there was no other encounter until the following Saturday when Roberta departed for Fonda. And Clyde, having ascertained the exact hour, left by the car ahead, and joined Roberta at the first station west. From that point on until evening, when she was compelled to take the seven o'clock train, they were unspeakably happy together, loitering near the little city comparatively strange to both.

For outside of Fonda a few miles they came to a pleasure park called Starlight where, in addition to a few clap-trap pleasure concessions such as a ring of captive aeroplanes, a Ferris wheel, a merry-go-round, an old mill and a dance floor, was a small lake with boats. It was after its fashion an idyllic spot with a little band-stand out on an island near the center of the lake and on the shore a grave and captive bear in a cage. Since coming to Lycurgus Roberta had not ventured to visit any of the rougher resorts near there, which were very much like this, only much more strident. On sight of this both exclaimed: "Oh, look!" And Clyde added at once: "Let's get off here, will you —shall we? What do you say? We're almost to Fonda anyhow. And we can have more fun here."

At once they climbed down. And having disposed of her bag for the time being, he led the way first to the stand of a man who sold frankfurters. Then, since the merry-go-round was in full blast, nothing would do but that Roberta should ride with him. And in the gayest of moods, they climbed on, and he placed her on a zebra, and then stood close in order that he might keep his arm about her, and both try to catch the brass ring. And as commonplace and noisy and gaudy as it all was, the fact that at last he had her all to himself unseen, and she him, was sufficient to evoke in both a kind of ecstasy which was

all out of proportion to the fragile, gimcrack scene. Round and round they spun on the noisy, grinding machine, surveying now a few idle pleasure seekers who were in boats upon the lake, now some who were flying round in the gaudy green and white captive aeroplanes or turning upward and then down in the suspended cages of the Ferris wheel.

Both looked at the woods and sky beyond the lake; the idlers and dancers in the dancing pavilion dreaming and thrilling, and then suddenly Clyde asked: "You dance, don't you, Roberta?"

"Why, no, I don't," she replied, a little sadly, for at the very moment she had been looking at the happy dancers rather ruefully and thinking how unfortunate it was that she had never been allowed to dance. It might not be right or nice, perhaps —her own church said it was not—but still, now that they were here and in love like this—these others looked so gay and happy —a pretty medley of colors moving round and round in the green and brown frame—it did not seem so bad to her. Why shouldn't people dance, anyway? Girls like herself and boys like Clyde? Her younger brother and sister, in spite of the views of her parents, were already declaring that when the opportunity offered, they were going to learn.

"Oh, isn't that too bad!" he exclaimed, thinking how delightful it would be to hold Roberta in his arms. "We could have such fun now if you could. I could teach you in a few minutes if you wanted me to."

"I don't know about that," she replied quizzically, her eyes showing that his suggestion appealed to her. "I'm not so clever that way. And you know dancing isn't considered so very nice in my part of the country. And my church doesn't approve of it, either. And I know my parents wouldn't like me to."

"Oh, shucks," replied Clyde foolishly and gayly, "what nonsense, Roberta. Why, everybody dances these days or nearly everybody. How can you think there's anything wrong with it?"

"Oh, I know," replied Roberta oddly and quaintly, "maybe they do in your set. I know most of those factory girls do, of course. And I suppose where you have money and position, everything's right. But with a girl like me, it's different. I don't suppose your parents were as strict as mine, either."

"Oh, weren't they, though?" laughed Clyde who had not failed to catch the "your set"; also the "where you have money and position."

"Well, that's all you know about it," he went on. "They were

as strict as yours and stricter, I'll bet. But I danced just the same. Why, there's no harm in it, Roberta. Come on, let me teach you. It's wonderful, really. Won't you, dearest?"

He put his arm around her and looked into her eyes and she half relented, quite weakened by her desire for him.

Just then the merry-go-round stopped and without any plan or suggestion they seemed instinctively to drift to the side of the pavilion where the dancers—not many but avid—were moving briskly around. Fox-trots and one-steps were being supplied by an orchestrelle of considerable size. At a turnstile, all the remaining portions of the pavilion being screened in, a pretty concessionaire was sitting and taking tickets—ten cents per dance per couple. But the color and the music and the motions of the dancers gliding rhythmically here and there quite seized upon both Clyde and Roberta.

The orchestrelle stopped and the dancers were coming out. But no sooner were they out than five-cent admission checks were once more sold for the new dance.

"I don't believe I can," pleaded Roberta, as Clyde led her to the ticket-stile. "I'm afraid I'm too awkward, maybe. I never danced, you know."

"You awkward, Roberta," he exclaimed. "Oh, how crazy. Why, you're as graceful and pretty as you can be. You'll see. You'll be a wonderful dancer."

Already he had paid the coin and they were inside.

Carried away by a bravado which was three-fourths her conception of him as a member of the Lycurgus upper crust and possessor of means and position, he led the way into a corner and began at once to illustrate the respective movements. They were not difficult and for a girl of Roberta's natural grace and zest, easy. Once the music started and Clyde drew her to him, she fell into the positions and steps without effort, and they moved rhythmically and instinctively together. It was the delightful sensation of being held by him and guided here and there that so appealed to her—the wonderful rhythm of his body coinciding with hers.

"Oh, you darling," he whispered. "Aren't you the dandy little dancer, though. You've caught on already. If you aren't the wonderful kid. I can hardly believe it."

They went about the floor once more, then a third time, before the music stopped and by the time it did, Roberta was lost in a sense of delight such as had never come to her before. To think she had been dancing! And it should be so wonderful! And with Clyde! He was so slim, graceful—quite the hand-

somest of any of the young men on the floor, she thought. And he, in turn, was now thinking that never had he known any one as sweet as Roberta. She was so gay and winsome and yielding. She would not try to work him for anything. And as for Sondra Finchley, well, she had ignored him and he might as well dismiss her from his mind—and yet even here, and with Roberta, he could not quite forget her.

At five-thirty when the orchestrelle was silenced for lack of customers and a sign reading "Next Concert 7.30" hung up, they were still dancing. After that they went for an ice-cream soda, then for something to eat, and by then, so swiftly had sped the time, it was necessary to take the very next car for the depot at Fonda.

As they neared this terminal, both Clyde and Roberta were full of schemes as to how they were to arrange for to-morrow. For Roberta would be coming back then and if she could arrange to leave her sister's a little early Sunday he could come over from Lycurgus to meet her. They could linger around Fonda until eleven at least, when the last train south from Homer was due. And pretending she had arrived on that they could then, assuming there was no one whom they knew on the Lycurgus car, journey to that city.

And as arranged so they met. And in the dark outlying streets of that city, walked and talked and planned, and Roberta told Clyde something—though not much—of her home life at Biltz.

But the great thing, apart from their love for each other and its immediate expression in kisses and embraces, was the how and where of further contacts. They must find some way, only, really, as Roberta saw it, she must be the one to find the way, and that soon. For while Clyde was obviously very impatient and eager to be with her as much as possible, still he did not appear to be very ready with suggestions—available ones.

But that, as she also saw, was not easy. For the possibility of another visit to her sister in Homer or her parents in Biltz was not even to be considered under a month. And apart from them what other excuses were there? New friends at the factory—the post-office—the library—the Y. W. C. A.—all suggestions of Clyde's at the moment. But these spelled but an hour or two together at best, and Clyde was thinking of other week-ends like this. And there were so few remaining summer week-ends.

CHAPTER XIX

THE return of Roberta and Clyde, as well as their outing together, was quite unobserved, as they thought. On the car from Fonda they recognized no one. And at the Newtons' Grace was already in bed. She merely awakened sufficiently to ask a few questions about the trip—and those were casual and indifferent. How was Roberta's sister? Had she stayed all day in Homer or had she gone to Biltz or Trippetts Mills? (Roberta explained that she had remained at her sister's.) She herself must be going up pretty soon to see her parents at Trippetts Mills. Then she fell asleep.

But at dinner the next night the Misses Opal Feliss and Olive Pope, who had been kept from the breakfast table by a too late return from Fonda and the very region in which Roberta had spent Saturday afternoon, now seated themselves and at once, as Roberta entered, interjected a few genial and well-meant but, in so far as Roberta was concerned, decidedly troubling observations.

"Oh, there you are! Look who's back from Starlight Park. Howja like the dancing over there, Miss Alden? We saw you, but you didn't see us." And before Roberta had time to think what to reply, Miss Feliss had added: "We tried to get your eye, but you couldn't see any one but him, I guess. I'll say you dance swell."

At once Roberta, who had never been on very intimate terms with either of these girls and who had neither the effrontery nor the wit to extricate herself from so swift and complete and so unexpected an exposure, flushed. She was all but speechless and merely stared, bethinking her at once that she had explained to Grace that she was at her sister's all day. And opposite sat Grace, looking directly at her, her lips slightly parted as though she would exclaim: "Well, of all things! And dancing! A man!" And at the head of the table, George Newton, thin and meticulous and curious, his sharp eyes and nose and pointed chin now turned in her direction.

But on the instant, realizing that she must say something, Roberta replied: "Oh, yes, that's so. I did go over there for a little while. Some friends of my sister's were coming over and

I went with them." She was about to add, "We didn't stay very long," but stopped herself. For at that moment a certain fighting quality which she had inherited from her mother, and which had asserted itself in the case of Grace before this, now came to her rescue. After all, why shouldn't she be at Starlight Park if she chose? And what right had the Newtons or Grace or anyone else to question her for that matter? She was paying her way. Nevertheless, as she realized, she had been caught in a deliberate lie and all because she lived here and was constantly being questioned and looked after in regard to her very least move. Miss Pope added curiously, "I don't suppose he's a Lycurgus boy. I don't remember ever seeing him around here."

"No, he isn't from here," returned Roberta shortly and coldly, for by now she was fairly quivering with the realization that she had been caught in a falsehood before Grace. Also that Grace would resent intensely this social secrecy and desertion of her. At once she felt as though she would like to get up from the table and leave and never return. But instead she did her best to compose herself, and now gave the two girls with whom she had never been familiar, a steady look. At the same time she looked at Grace and Mr. Newton with defiance. If anything more were said she proposed to give a fictitious name or two—friends of her brother-in-law in Homer, or better yet to refuse to give any information whatsoever. Why should she?

Nevertheless, as she learned later that evening, she was not to be spared the refusing of it. Grace, coming to their room immediately afterward, reproached her with: "I thought you said you stayed out at your sister's all the time you were gone?"

"Well, what if I did say it?" replied Roberta defiantly and even bitterly, but without a word in extenuation, for her thought was now that unquestionably Grace was pretending to catechize her on moral grounds, whereas in reality the real source of her anger and pique was that Roberta was slipping away from and hence neglecting her.

"Well, you don't have to lie to me in order to go anywhere or see anybody without me in the future. I don't want to go with you. And what's more I don't want to know where you go or who you go with. But I do wish you wouldn't tell me one thing and then have George and Mary find out that it ain't so, and that you're just trying to slip away from me or that I'm lying to them in order to protect myself. I don't want you to put me in that position."

She was very hurt and sad and contentious and Roberta could

see for herself that there was no way out of this trying situation other than to move. Grace was a leech—a hanger-on. She had no life of her own and could contrive none. As long as she was anywhere near her she would want to devote herself to her—to share her every thought and mood with her. And yet if she told her about Clyde she would be shocked and critical and would unquestionably eventually turn on her or even expose her. So she merely replied: "Oh, well, have it that way if you want to. I don't care. I don't propose to tell anything unless I choose to."

And at once Grace conceived the notion that Roberta did not like her any more and would have nothing to do with her. She arose immediately and walked out of the room—her head very high and her spine very stiff. And Roberta, realizing that she had made an enemy of her, now wished that she was out of here. They were all too narrow here anyway. They would never understand or tolerate this clandestine relationship with Clyde—so necessary to him apparently, as he had explained—so troublesome and even disgraceful to her from one point of view, and yet so precious. She did love him, so very, very much. And she must now find some way to protect herself and him—move to another room.

But that in this instance required almost more courage and decision than she could muster. The anomalous and unprotected nature of a room where one was not known. The look of it. Subsequent explanation to her mother and sister maybe. Yet to remain here after this was all but impossible, too, for the attitude of Grace as well as the Newtons—particularly Mrs. Newton, Grace's sister—was that of the early Puritans or Friends who had caught a "brother" or "sister" in a great sin. She was dancing—and secretly! There was the presence of that young man not quite adequately explained by her trip home, to say nothing of her presence at Starlight Park. Besides, in Roberta's mind was the thought that under such definite espionage as must now follow, to say nothing of the unhappy and dictatorial attitude of Grace, she would have small chance to be with Clyde as much as she now most intensely desired. And accordingly, after two days of unhappy thought and then a conference with Clyde who was all for her immediate independence in a new room where she would not be known or spied upon, she proceeded to take an hour or two off; and having fixed upon the southeast section of the city as one most likely to be free from contact with either the Newtons or those whom thus far she had encountered at the Newtons', she

inquired there, and after little more than an hour's search found one place which pleased her. This was in an old brick house in Elm Street occupied by an upholsterer and his wife and two daughters, one a local milliner and another still in school. The room offered was on the ground floor to the right of a small front porch and overlooking the street. A door off this same porch gave into a living room which separated this room from the other parts of the house and permitted ingress and egress without contact with any other portion of the house. And since she was still moved to meet Clyde clandestinely this as she now saw was important.

Besides, as she gathered from her one conversation with Mrs. Gilpin, the mother of this family, the character of this home was neither so strict nor inquisitive as that of the Newtons. Mrs. Gilpin was large, passive, cleanly, not so very alert and about fifty. She informed Roberta that as a rule she didn't care to take boarders or roomers at all, since the family had sufficient means to go on. However, since the family scarcely ever used the front room, which was rather set off from the remainder of the house, and since her husband did not object, she had made up her mind to rent it. And again she preferred some one who worked like Roberta—a girl, not a man—and one who would be glad to have her breakfast and dinner along with her family. Since she asked no questions as to her family or connections, merely looking at her interestedly and seeming to be favorably impressed by her appearance, Roberta gathered that here were no such standards as prevailed at the Newtons.

And yet what qualms in connection with the thought of moving thus. For about this entire clandestine procedure there hung, as she saw it, a sense of something untoward and even sinful, and then on top of it all, quarreling and then breaking with Grace Marr, her one girl friend here thus far, and the Newtons on account of it, when, as she well knew, it was entirely due to Grace that she was here at all. Supposing her parents or her sister in Homer should hear about this through some one whom Grace knew and think strangely of her going off by herself in Lycurgus in this way? Was it right? Was it possible that she could do things like this—and so soon after her coming here? She was beginning to feel as though her hitherto impeccable standards were crumbling.

And yet there was Clyde now. Could she give him up?

After many emotional aches she decided that she could not. And accordingly after paying a deposit and arranging to occupy the room within the next few days, she returned to her work

and after dinner the same evening announced to Mrs. Newton that she was going to move. Her premeditated explanation was that recently she had been thinking of having her younger brother and sister come and live with her and since one or both were likely to come soon, she thought it best to prepare for them.

And the Newtons, as well as Grace, feeling that this was all due to the new connections which Roberta had recently been making and which were tending to alienate her from Grace, were now content to see her go. Plainly she was beginning to indulge in a type of adventure of which they could not approve. Also it was plain that she was not going to prove as useful to Grace as they had at first imagined. Possibly she knew what she was doing. But more likely she was being led astray by notions of a good time not consistent with the reserved life led by her at Trippetts Mills.

And Roberta herself, once having made this move and settled herself in this new atmosphere (apart from the fact that it gave her much greater freedom in connection with Clyde) was dubious as to her present course. Perhaps—perhaps—she had moved hastily and in anger and might be sorry. Still she had done it now, and it could not be helped. So she proposed to try it for a while.

To salve her own conscience more than anything else, she at once wrote her mother and her sister a very plausible version of why she had been compelled to leave the Newtons. Grace had grown too possessive, domineering and selfish. It had become unendurable. However, her mother need not worry. She was satisfactorily placed. She had a room to herself and could now entertain Tom and Emily or her mother or Agnes, in case they should ever visit her here. And she would be able to introduce them to the Gilpins whom she proceeded to describe.

Nevertheless, her underlying thought in connection with all this, in so far as Clyde and his great passion for her was concerned—and hers for him—was that she was indeed trifling with fire and perhaps social disgrace into the bargain. For, although consciously at this time she was scarcely willing to face the fact that this room—its geometric position in relation to the rest of the house—had been of the greatest import to her at the time she first saw it, yet subconsciously she knew it well enough. The course she was pursuing was dangerous—that she knew. And yet how, as she now so often asked herself at moments when she was confronted by some desire which ran counter to her sense of practicability and social morality, was she to do?

CHAPTER XX

HOWEVER, as both Roberta and Clyde soon found, after several weeks in which they met here and there, such spots as could be conveniently reached by interurban lines, there were still drawbacks and the principal of these related to the attitude of both Roberta and Clyde in regard to this room, and what, if any, use of it was to be made by them jointly. For in spite of the fact that thus far Clyde had never openly agreed with himself that his intentions in relation to Roberta were in any way different to those normally entertained by any youth toward any girl for whom he had a conventional social regard, still, now that she had moved into this room, there was that ineradicable and possibly censurable, yet very human and almost unescapable, desire for something more—the possibility of greater and greater intimacy with and control of Roberta and her thoughts and actions in everything so that in the end she would be entirely his. But how *his?* By way of marriage and the ordinary conventional and durable existence which thereafter must ordinarily ensue? He had never said so to himself thus far. For in flirting with her or any girl of a lesser social position than that of the Griffiths here (Sondra Finchley, Bertine Cranston, for instance) he would not—and that largely due to the attitude of his newly-found relatives, their very high position in this city—have deemed marriage advisable. And what would they think if they should come to know? For socially, as he saw himself now, if not before coming here, he was supposed to be above the type of Roberta and should of course profit by that notion. Besides there were all those that knew him here, at least to speak to. On the other hand, because of the very marked pull that her temperament had for him, he had not been able to say for the time being that she was not worthy of him or that he might not be happy in case it were possible or advisable for him to marry her.

And there was another thing now that tended to complicate matters. And that was that fall with its chilling winds and frosty nights was drawing near. Already it was near October first and most of those out-of-door resorts which, up to the middle of September at least, had provided diversion, and that at a fairly safe distance from Lycurgus, were already closed for the

season. And dancing, except in the halls of the near-by cities and which, because of a mood of hers in regard to them, were unacceptable, was also for the time being done away with. As for the churches, moving pictures, and restaurants of Lycurgus, how under the circumstances, owing to Clyde's position here, could they be seen in them? They could not, as both reasoned between them. And so now, while her movements were unrestrained, there was no place to go unless by some readjustment of their relations he might be permitted to call on her at the Gilpins'. But that, as he knew, she would not think of and, at first, neither had he the courage to suggest it.

However they were at a street-end one early October night about six weeks after she had moved to her new room. The stars were sharp. The air cool. The leaves were beginning to turn. Roberta had returned to a three-quarter green-and-cream-striped winter coat that she wore at this season of the year. Her hat was brown, trimmed with brown leather and of a design that became her. There had been kisses over and over—that same fever that had been dominating them continuously since first they met—only more pronounced if anything.

"It's getting cold, isn't it?" It was Clyde who spoke. And it was eleven o'clock and chill.

"Yes, I should say it is. I'll soon have to get a heavier coat."

"I don't see how we are to do from now on, do you? There's no place to go any more much, and it won't be very pleasant walking the streets this way every night. You don't suppose we could fix it so I could call on you at the Gilpins' once in a while, do you? It isn't the same there now as it was at the Newtons'."

"Oh, I know, but then they use their sitting room every night nearly until ten-thirty or eleven. And besides their two girls are in and out all hours up to twelve, anyhow, and they're in there often. I don't see how I can. Besides, I thought you said you didn't want to have any one see you with me that way, and if you came there I couldn't help introducing you."

"Oh, but I don't mean just that way," replied Clyde audaciously and yet with the feeling that Roberta was much too squeamish and that it was high time she was taking a somewhat more liberal attitude toward him if she cared for him as much as she appeared to: "Why wouldn't it be all right for me to stop in for a little while? They wouldn't need to know, would they?" He took out his watch and discovered with the aid of a match that it was eleven-thirty. He showed the time to her. "There wouldn't be anybody there now, would there?"

She shook her head in opposition. The thought not only terri-

fied but sickened her. Clyde was getting very bold to even suggest anything like that. Besides this suggestion embodied in itself all the secret fears and compelling moods which hitherto, although actual in herself, she was still unwilling to face. There was something sinful, low, dreadful about it. She would not. That was one thing sure. At the same time within her was that overmastering urge of repressed and feared desire now knocking loudly for recognition.

"No, no, I can't let you do that. It wouldn't be right. I don't want to. Some one might see us. Somebody might know you." For the moment the moral repulsion was so great that unconsciously she endeavored to relinquish herself from his embrace.

Clyde sensed how deep was this sudden revolt. All the more was he flagellated by the desire for possession of that which now he half feared to be unobtainable. A dozen seductive excuses sprang to his lips. "Oh, who would be likely to see us anyhow, at this time of night? There isn't any one around. Why shouldn't we go there for a few moments if we want to? No one would be likely to hear us. We needn't talk so loud. There isn't any one on the street, even. Let's walk by the house and see if anybody is up."

Since hitherto she had not permitted him to come within half a block of the house, her protest was not only nervous but vigorous. Nevertheless on this occasion Clyde was proving a little rebellious and Roberta, standing somewhat in awe of him as her superior, as well as her lover, was unable to prevent their walking within a few feet of the house where they stopped. Except for a barking dog there was not a sound to be heard anywhere. And in the house no light was visible.

"See, there's no one up," protested Clyde reassuringly. "Why shouldn't we go in for a little while if we want to? Who will know? We needn't make any noise. Besides, what is wrong with it? Other people do it. It isn't such a terrible thing for a girl to take a fellow to her room if she wants to for a little while."

"Oh, isn't it? Well, maybe not in your set. But I know what's right and I don't think that's right and I won't do it."

At once, as she said this, Roberta's heart gave a pained and weakening throb, for in saying so much she had exhibited more individuality and defiance than ever he had seen or that she fancied herself capable of in connection with him. It terrified her not a little. Perhaps he would not like her so much now if she were going to talk like that.

His mood darkened immediately. Why did she want to act so? She was too cautious, too afraid of anything that spelled a little life or pleasure. Other girls were not like that,—Rita, those girls at the factory. She pretended to love him. She did not object to his holding her in his arms and kissing her under a tree at the end of the street. But when it came to anything slightly more private or intimate, she could not bring herself to agree. What kind of a girl was she, anyhow? What was the use of pursuing her? Was this to be another case of Hortense Briggs with all her wiles and evasions? Of course Roberta was in no wise like her, but still she was so stubborn.

Although she could not see his face she knew he was angry and quite for the first time in this way.

"All right, then, if you don't want to, you don't have to," came his words and with decidedly a cold ring to them. "There are other places I can go. I notice you never want to do anything I want to do, though. I'd like to know how you think we're to do. We can't walk the streets every night." His tone was gloomy and foreboding—more contentious and bitter than at any time ever between them. And his references to other places shocked and frightened Roberta—so much so that instantly almost her own mood changed. Those other girls in his own world that no doubt he saw from time to time! Those other girls at the factory who were always trying to make eyes at him! She had seen them trying, and often. That Ruza Nikoforitch—as coarse as she was, but pretty, too. And that Flora Brandt! And Martha Bordaloue—ugh! To think that any one as nice as he should be pursued by such wretches as those. However, because of that, she was fearful lest he would think her too difficult—some one without the experience or daring to which he, in his superior world, was accustomed, and so turn to one of those. Then she would lose him. The thought terrified her. Immediately from one of defiance her attitude changed to one of pleading persuasion.

"Oh, please, Clyde, don't be mad with me now, will you? You know that I would if I could. I can't do anything like that here. Can't you see? You know that. Why, they'd be sure to find out. And how would you feel if some one were to see us or recognize you?" In a pleading way she put one hand on his arm, then about his waist and he could feel that in spite of her sharp opposition the moment before, she was very much concerned—painfully so. "Please don't ask me to," she added in a begging tone.

"Well, what did you want to leave the Newtons for then?"

he asked sullenly. "I can't see where else we can go now if you won't let me come to see you once in a while. We can't go any place else."

The thought gave Roberta pause. Plainly this relationship was not to be held within conventional lines. At the same time she did not see how she could possibly comply. It was too unconventional—too unmoral—bad.

"I thought we took it," she said weakly and placatively, "just so that we could go places on Saturday and Sunday."

"But where can we go Saturday and Sunday now? Everything's closed."

Again Roberta was checked by these unanswerable complexities which beleaguered them both and she exclaimed futilely, "Oh, I wish I knew what to do."

"Oh, it would be easy enough if you wanted to do it, but that's always the way with you, you don't want to."

She stood there, the night wind shaking the drying whispering leaves. Distinctly the problem in connection with him that she had been fearing this long while was upon her. Could she possibly, with all the right instruction that she had had, now do as he suggested. She was pulled and swayed by contending forces within herself, strong and urgent in either case. In the one instance, however painful it was to her moral and social mood, she was moved to comply—in another to reject once and for all, any such, as she saw it, bold and unnatural suggestion. Nevertheless, in spite of the latter and because of her compelling affection she could not do other than deal tenderly and pleadingly with him.

"I can't, Clyde, I can't. I would if I could but I can't. It wouldn't be right. I would if I could make myself, but I can't." She looked up into his face, a pale oval in the dark, trying to see if he would not see, sympathize, be moved in her favor. However, irritated by this plainly definite refusal, he was not now to be moved. All this, as he saw it, smacked of that long series of defeats which had accompanied his attentions to Hortense Briggs. He was not going to stand for anything now like that, you bet. If this was the way she was going to act, well, let her act so—but not with him. He could get plenty of girls now—lots of them—who would treat him better than this.

At once, and with an irritated shrug of the shoulders, as she now saw, he turned and started to leave her, saying as he did so, "Oh, that's all right, if that's the way you feel about it." And Roberta dumfounded and terrified, stood there.

"Please don't go, Clyde. Please don't leave me," she ex-

claimed suddenly and pathetically, her defiance and courage undergoing a deep and sad change. "I don't want you to. I love you so, Clyde. I would if I could. You know that."

"Oh, yes, I know, but you needn't tell me that" (it was his experience with Hortense and Rita that was prompting him to this attitude). With a twist he released his body from her arm and started walking briskly down the street in the dark.

And Roberta, stricken by this sudden development which was so painful to both, called, "Clyde!" And then ran after him a little way, eager that he should pause and let her plead with him more. But he did not return. Instead he went briskly on. And for the moment it was all she could do to keep from following him and by sheer force, if need be, restrain him. Her Clyde! And she started running in his direction a little, but as suddenly stopped, checked for the moment by the begging, pleading, compromising attitude in which she, for the first time, found herself. For on the one hand all her conventional training was now urging her to stand firm—not to belittle herself in this way—whereas on the other, all her desires for love, understanding, companionship, urged her to run after him before it was too late, and he was gone. His beautiful face, his beautiful hands. His eyes. And still the receding echo of his feet. And yet so binding were the conventions which had been urged upon her up to this time that, though suffering horribly, a balance between the two forces was struck, and she paused, feeling that she could neither go forward nor stand still—understand or endure this sudden rift in their wonderful friendship.

Pain constricted her heart and whitened her lips. She stood there numb and silent—unable to voice anything, even the name Clyde which persistently arose as a call in her throat. Instead she was merely thinking, "Oh, Clyde, please don't go, Clyde. Oh, please don't go." And he was already out of hearing, walking briskly and grimly on, the click and echo of his receding steps falling less and less clearly on her suffering ears.

It was the first flashing, blinding, bleeding stab of love for her.

CHAPTER XXI

THE state of Roberta's mind for that night is not easily to be described. For here was true and poignant love, and in youth true and poignant love is difficult to withstand. Besides it was coupled with the most stirring and grandiose illusions in regard to Clyde's local material and social condition—illusions which had little to do with anything he had done to build up, but were based rather on conjecture and gossip over which he had no control. And her own home, as well as her personal situation was so unfortunate—no promise of any kind save in his direction. And here she was quarreling with him—sending him away angry. On the other hand was he not beginning to push too ardently toward those troublesome and no doubt dreadful liberties and familiarities which her morally trained conscience would not permit her to look upon as right? How was she to do now? What to say?

Now it was that she said to herself in the dark of her room, after having slowly and thoughtfully undressed and noiselessly crept into the large, old-fashioned bed. "No, I won't do that. I mustn't. I can't. I will be a bad girl if I do. I should not do that for him even though he does want me to, and should threaten to leave me forever in case I refuse. He should be ashamed to ask me." And at the very same moment, or the next, she would be asking herself what else under the circumstances they were to do. For most certainly Clyde was at least partially correct in his contention that they had scarcely anywhere else they could go and not be recognized. How unfair was that rule of the company. And no doubt apart from that rule, the Griffiths would think it beneath him to be troubling with her, as would no doubt the Newtons and the Gilpins for that matter, if they should hear and know who he was. And if this information came to their knowledge it would injure him and her. And she would not do anything that would injure him—never.

One thing that occurred to her at this point was that she should get a place somewhere else so that this problem should be solved—a problem which at the moment seemed to have little to do with the more immediate and intimate one of desiring to

enter her room. But that would mean that she would not see him any more all day long—only at night. And then not every night by any means. And that caused her to lay aside this thought of seeking another place.

At the same time as she now meditated the dawn would come to-morrow and there would be Clyde at the factory. And supposing that he should not speak to her nor she to him. Impossible! Ridiculous! Terrible! The mere thought brought her to a sitting posture in bed, where distractedly a vision of Clyde looking indifferently and coldly upon her came to her.

On the instant she was on her feet and had turned on the one incandescent globe which dangled from the center of the room. She went to the mirror hanging above the old walnut dresser in the corner and stared at herself. Already she imagined she could see dark rings under her eyes. She felt numb and cold and now shook her head in a helpless and distracted way. He couldn't be that mean. He couldn't be that cruel to her now—could he? Oh, if he but knew how difficult—how impossible was the thing he was asking of her! Oh, if the day would only come so that she could see his face again! Oh, if it were only another night so that she could take his hands in hers—his arm—feel his arms about her.

"Clyde, Clyde," she exclaimed half aloud. "you wouldn't do that to me, would you—you couldn't."

She crossed to an old, faded and somewhat decrepit overstuffed chair which stood in the center of the room beside a small table whereon lay some nondescript books and magazines—the *Saturday Evening Post, Munsey's,* the *Popular Science Monthly, Bebe's Garden Seeds,* and to escape most distracting and searing thoughts, sat down, her chin in her hands, her elbows planted on her knees. But the painful thoughts continuing and a sense of chill overtaking her, she took a comforter off the bed and folded it about her, then opened the seed catalogue—only to throw it down.

"No, no, no, he couldn't do that to me, he wouldn't." She must not let him. Why, he had told her over and over that he was crazy about her—madly in love with her. They had been to all these wonderful places together.

And now, without any real consciousness of her movements, she was moving from the chair to the edge of the bed, sitting with elbows on knees and chin in hands; or she was before the mirror or peering restlessly out into the dark to see if there were any trace of day. And at six, and six-thirty when the light was just breaking and it was nearing time to dress, she was still

up—in the chair, on the edge of the bed, in the corner before the mirror.

But she had reached but one definite conclusion and that was that in some way she must arrange not to have Clyde leave her. That must not be. There must be something that she could say or do that would cause him to love her still—even if, even if—well, even if she must let him stop in here or somewhere from time to time—some other room in some other rooming house maybe, where she could arrange in some way beforehand—say that he was her brother or something.

But the mood that dominated Clyde was of a different nature. To have understood it correctly, the full measure and obstinacy and sullen contentiousness that had suddenly generated, one would have had to return to Kansas City and the period in which he had been so futilely dancing attendance upon Hortense Briggs. Also his having been compelled to give up Rita,—yet to no end. For, although the present conditions and situation were different, and he had no moral authority wherewith to charge Roberta with any such unfair treatment as Hortense had meted out to him, still there was this other fact that girls—all of them—were obviously stubborn and self-preservative, always setting themselves apart from and even above the average man and so wishing to compel him to do a lot of things for them without their wishing to do anything in return. And had not Ratterer always told him that in so far as girls were concerned he was more or less of a fool—too easy—too eager to show his hand and let them know that he was struck on them. Whereas, as Ratterer had explained, Clyde possessed the looks—the "goods"—and why should he always be trailing after girls unless they wanted him very much. And this thought and compliment had impressed him very much at that time. Only because of the fiascos in connection with Hortense and Rita he was more earnest now. Yet here he was again in danger of repeating or bringing upon himself what had befallen him in the case of Hortense and Rita.

At the same time he was not without the self-incriminating thought that in seeking this, most distinctly he was driving toward a relationship which was not legitimate and that would prove dangerous in the future. For, as he now darkly and vaguely thought, if he sought a relationship which her prejudices and her training would not permit her to look upon as anything but evil, was he not thereby establishing in some form a claim on her part to some consideration from him in the future which it might not be so easy for him to ignore? For after all he was the aggressor—not she. And because of this, and whatever might

follow in connection with it, might not she be in a position to demand more from him than he might be willing to give? For was it his intention to marry her? In the back of his mind there lurked something which even now assured him that he would never desire to marry her—could not in the face of his high family connections here. Therefore should he proceed to demand—or should he not? And if he did, could he avoid that which would preclude any claim in the future?

He did not thus so distinctly voice his inmost feelings to himself, but relatively of such was their nature. Yet so great was the temperamental and physical enticement of Roberta that in spite of a warning nudge or mood that seemed to hint that it was dangerous for him to persist in his demand, he kept saying to himself that unless she would permit him to her room, he would not have anything more to do with her, the desire for her being all but overpowering.

This contest which every primary union between the sexes, whether with or without marriage implies, was fought out the next day in the factory. And yet without a word on either side. For Clyde, although he considered himself to be deeply in love with Roberta, was still not so deeply involved but that a naturally selfish and ambitious and seeking disposition would in this instance stand its ground and master any impulse. And he was determined to take the attitude of one who had been injured and was determined not to be friends any more or yield in any way unless some concession on her part, such as would appease him, was made.

And in consequence he came into the stamping department that morning with the face and air of one who was vastly preoccupied with matters which had little, if anything, to do with what had occurred the night before. Yet, being far from certain that this attitude on his part was likely to lead to anything but defeat, he was inwardly depressed and awry. For, after all, the sight of Roberta, freshly arrived, and although pale and distrait, as charming and energetic as ever, was not calculated to assure him of any immediate or even ultimate victory. And knowing her as well as he thought he did, by now, he was but weakly sustained by the thought that she might yield.

He looked at her repeatedly when she was not looking. And when in turn she looked at him repeatedly, but only at first when he was not looking, later when she felt satisfied that his eyes, whether directly bent on her or not, must be encompassing her, still no trace of recognition could she extract. And now to her bitter disappointment, not only did he choose to ignore her,

but quite for the first time since they had been so interested in each other, he professed to pay, if not exactly conspicuous at least noticeable and intentional attention to those other girls who were always so interested in him and who always, as she had been constantly imagining, were but waiting for any slight overture on his part, to yield themselves to him in any way that he might dictate.

Now he was looking over the shoulder of Ruza Nikoforitch, her plump face with its snub nose and weak chin turned engagingly toward him, and he commenting on something not particularly connected with the work in hand apparently, for both were idly smiling. Again, in a little while, he was by the side of Martha Bordaloue, her plump French shoulders and arms bare to the pits next to his. And for all her fleshly solidity and decidedly foreign flavor, there was still enough about her which most men would like. And with her Clyde was attempting to jest, too.

And later it was Flora Brandt, the very sensuous and not unpleasing American girl whom Roberta had seen Clyde cultivating from time to time. Yet, even so, she had never been willing to believe that he might become interested in any of these. Not Clyde, surely.

And yet he could not see her at all now—could not find time to say a single word, although all these pleasant words and gay looks for all these others. Oh, how bitter! Oh, how cruel! And how utterly she despised those other girls with their oglings and their open attempts to take him from her. Oh, how terrible. Surely he must be very opposed to her now—otherwise he could not do this, and especially after all that had been between them—the love—the kisses.

The hours dragged for both, and with as much poignance for Clyde as for Roberta. For his was a feverish, urgent disposition where his dreams were concerned, and could ill brook the delay or disappointments that are the chief and outstanding characteristics of the ambitions of men, whatever their nature. He was tortured hourly by the thought that he was to lose Roberta or that to win her back he would have to succumb to her wishes.

And on her part she was torn, not so much by the question as to whether she would have to yield in this matter (for by now that was almost the least of her worries), but whether, once so yielding, Clyde would be satisfied with just some form of guarded social contact in the room—or not. And so continue on the strength of that to be friends with her. For more than this she would not grant—never. And yet—this suspense. The

misery of his indifference. She could scarcely endure it from minute to minute, let alone from hour to hour, and finally in an agony of dissatisfaction with herself at having brought all this on herself, she retired to the rest room at about three in the afternoon and there with the aid of a piece of paper found on the floor and a small bit of pencil which she had, she composed a brief note:

"Please, Clyde, don't be mad at me, will you? Please don't. Please look at me and speak to me, won't you? I'm so sorry about last night, really I am—terribly. And I must see you to-night at the end of Elm Street at 8.30 if you can, will you? I have something to tell you. Please do come. And please do look at me and tell me you will, even though you are angry. You won't be sorry. I love you so. You know I do.

"Your sorrowful,
"ROBERTA."

And in the spirit of one who is in agonized search for an opiate, she folded up the paper and returning to the room, drew close to Clyde's desk. He was before it at the time, bent over some slips. And quickly as she passed she dropped the paper between his hands. He looked up instantly, his dark eyes still hard at the moment with the mingled pain and unrest and dissatisfaction and determination that had been upon him all day, and noting Roberta's retreating figure as well as the note, he at once relaxed, a wave of puzzled satisfaction as well as delight instantly filling them. He opened it and read. And as instantly his body was suffused with a warm and yet very weakening ray.

And Roberta in turn, having reached her table and paused to note if by any chance any one had observed her, now looked cautiously about, a strained and nervous look in her eyes. But seeing Clyde looking directly at her, his eyes filled with a conquering and yet yielding light and a smile upon his lips, and his head nodding a happy assent, she as suddenly experienced a dizzying sensation, as though her hitherto constricted blood, detained by a constricted heart and constricted nerves, were as suddenly set free. And all the dry marshes and cracked and parched banks of her soul—the dry rivulets and streams and lakes of misery that seemed to dot her being—were as instantly flooded with this rich upwelling force of life and love.

He would meet her. They would meet to-night. He would put his arms around her and kiss her as before. She would be able to look in his eyes. They would not quarrel any more—oh, never if she could help it.

CHAPTER XXII

THE wonder and delight of a new and more intimate form of contact, of protest gainsaid, of scruples overcome! Days, when both, having struggled in vain against the greater intimacy which each knew that the other was desirous of yielding to, and eventually so yielding, looked forward to the approaching night with an eagerness which was as a fever embodying a fear. For with what qualms—what protests on the part of Roberta; what determination, yet not without a sense of evil—seduction—betrayal, on the part of Clyde. Yet the thing once done, a wild convulsive pleasure motivating both. Yet, not without, before all this, an exaction on the part of Roberta to the effect that never—come what might (the natural consequences of so wild an intimacy strong in her thoughts) would he desert her, since without his aid she would be helpless. Yet, with no direct statement as to marriage. And he, so completely overcome and swayed by his desire, thoughtlessly protesting that he never would—never. She might depend on that, at least, although even then there was no thought in his mind of marriage. He would not do that. Yet nights and nights—all scruples for the time being abandoned, and however much by day Roberta might brood and condemn herself—when each yielded to the other completely. And dreamed thereafter, recklessly and wildly, of the joy of it—wishing from day to day for the time being that the long day might end—that the concealing, rewarding feverish night were at hand.

And Clyde feeling, and not unlike Roberta, who was firmly and even painfully convinced of it, that this was sin—deadly, mortal—since both his mother and father had so often emphasized that—the seducer—adulterer—who preys outside the sacred precincts of marriage. And Roberta, peering nervously into the blank future, wondering what—how, in any case, by any chance, Clyde should change, or fail her. Yet the night returning, her mood once more veering, and she as well as he hurrying to meet somewhere—only later, in the silence of the middle night, to slip into this unlighted room which was proving so much more of a Paradise than either might ever know again—so wild and unrecapturable is the fever of youth.

And—at times—and despite all his other doubts and fears, Clyde, because of this sudden abandonment by Roberta of herself to his desires, feeling for the first time, really, in all his feverish years, that at last he was a man of the world—one who was truly beginning to know women. And so taking to himself an air or manner that said as plainly as might have any words—"Behold I am no longer the inexperienced, neglected simpleton of but a few weeks ago, but an individual of import now—some one who knows something about life. What have any of these strutting young men, and gay, coaxing, flirting girls all about me, that I have not? And if I chose—were less loyal than I am—what might I not do?" And this was proving to him that the notion which Hortense Briggs, to say nothing of the more recent fiasco in connection with Rita had tended to build up in his mind, i.e.,—that he was either unsuccessful or ill-fated where girls were concerned was false. He was after all and despite various failures and inhibitions a youth of the Don Juan or Lothario stripe.

And if now Roberta was obviously willing to sacrifice herself for him in this fashion, must there not be others?

And this, in spite of the present indifference of the Griffiths, caused him to walk with even more of an air than had hitherto characterized him. Even though neither they nor any of those connected with them recognized him, still he looked at himself in his mirror from time to time with an assurance and admiration which before this he had never possessed. For now Roberta, feeling that her future was really dependent on his will and whim, had set herself to flatter him almost constantly, to be as obliging and convenient to him as possible. Indeed, according to her notion of the proper order of life, she was now his and his only, as much as any wife is ever to a husband, to do with as he wished.

And for a time therefore, Clyde forgot his rather neglected state here and was content to devote himself to her without thinking much of the future. The one thing that did trouble him at times was the thought that possibly, in connection with the original fear she had expressed to him, something might go wrong, which, considering her exclusive devotion to him, might prove embarrassing. At the same time he did not trouble to speculate too deeply as to that. He had Roberta now. These relations, in so far as either of them could see, or guess, were a dark secret. The pleasures of this left-handed honeymoon were at full tide. And the remaining brisk and often sunshiny and warm November and first December days passed—as in a

dream, really—an ecstatic paradise of sorts in the very center of a humdrum conventional and petty and underpaid work-a-day world.

In the meantime the Griffiths had been away from the city since the middle of June and ever since their departure Clyde had been meditating upon them and all they represented in his life and that of the city. Their great house closed and silent, except for gardeners and an occasional chauffeur or servant visible as he walked from time to time past the place, was the same as a shrine to him, nearly—the symbol of that height to which by some turn of fate he might still hope to attain. For he had never quite been able to expel from his mind the thought that his future must in some way be identified with the grandeur that was here laid out before him.

Yet so far as the movements of the Griffiths family and their social peers outside Lycurgus were concerned, he knew little other than that which from time to time he had read in the society columns of the two local papers which almost obsequiously pictured the comings and goings of all those who were connected with the more important families of the city. At times, after reading these accounts he had pictured to himself, even when he was off somewhere with Roberta at some unheralded resort, Gilbert Griffiths racing in his big car, Bella, Bertine and Sondra dancing, canoeing in the moonlight, playing tennis, riding at some of the smart resorts where they were reported to be. The thing had had a bite and ache for him that was almost unendurable and had lit up for him at times and with overwhelming clarity this connection of his with Roberta. For after all, who was she? A factory girl! The daughter of parents who lived and worked on a farm and one who was compelled to work for her own living. Whereas he—he—if fortune would but favor him a little—! Was this to be the end of all his dreams in connection with his perspective superior life here?

So it was that at moments and in his darker moods, and especially after she had abandoned herself to him, his thoughts ran. She was not of his station, really—at least not of that of the Griffiths to which still he most eagerly aspired. Yet at the same time, whatever the mood generated by such items as he read in *The Star,* he would still return to Roberta, picturing her, since the other mood which had drawn him to her had by no means palled as yet, as delightful, precious, exceedingly worth-while from the point of view of beauty, pleasure, sweetness—the attributes and charms which best identify any object of delight.

But the Griffiths and their friends having returned to the city,

and Lycurgus once more taken on that brisk, industrial and social mood which invariably characterized it for at least seven months in the year, he was again, and even more vigorously than before, intrigued by it. The beauty of the various houses along Wykeagy Avenue and its immediate tributaries! . The unusual and intriguing sense of movement and life there so much in evidence. Oh, if he were but of it!

CHAPTER XXIII

AND then, one November evening as Clyde was walking along Wykeagy Avenue, just west of Central, a portion of the locally celebrated avenue which, ever since he had moved to Mrs. Peyton's he was accustomed to traverse to and from his work, one thing did occur which in so far as he and the Griffiths were concerned was destined to bring about a chain of events which none of them could possibly have foreseen. At the time there was in his heart and mind that singing which is the inheritance of youth and ambition and which the dying of the old year, instead of depressing, seemed but to emphasize. He had a good position. He was respected here. Over and above his room and board he had not less than fifteen dollars a week to spend on himself and Roberta, an income which, while it did not parallel that which had been derived from the Green-Davidson or the Union League, was still not so involved with family miseries in the one place or personal loneliness in the other. And he had Roberta secretly devoted to him. And the Griffiths, thank goodness, did not and should not know anything of that, though just how in case of a difficulty it was to be avoided, he was not even troubling to think. His was a disposition which did not tend to load itself with more than the most immediate cares.

And although the Griffiths and their friends had not chosen to recognize him socially, still more and more all others who were not connected with local society and who knew of him, did. Only this very day, because the spring before he had been made a room-chief, perhaps, and Samuel Griffiths had recently paused and talked with him, no less an important personage than Mr. Rudolph Smillie, one of the several active vice-presidents, had asked him most cordially and casually whether he played golf, and if so, when spring came again, whether he might not be interested to join the Amoskeag, one of the two really important golf clubs within a half dozen miles of the city. Now, what could that mean, if not that Mr. Smillie was beginning to see him as a social possibility, and that he as well as many others about the factory, were becoming aware of him as some one who was of some importance to the Griffiths, if not the factory.

This thought, together with one other—that once more after dinner he was to see Roberta and in her room as early as eleven o'clock or even earlier—cheered him and caused him to step along most briskly and gayly. For, since having indulged in this secret adventure so many times, both were unconsciously becoming bolder. Not having been detected to date, they were of the notion that it was possible they might not be. Or if they were Clyde might be introduced as her brother or cousin for the moment, anyhow, in order to avoid immediate scandal. Later, to avoid danger of comment or subsequent detection, as both had agreed after some discussion, Roberta might have to move to some other place where the same routine was to be repeated. But that would be easy, or at least better than no freedom of contact. And with that Roberta had been compelled to agree.

However, on this occasion there came a contact and an interruption which set his thoughts careening in an entirely different direction. Reaching the first of the more important houses of Wykeagy Avenue, although he had not the slightest idea who lived there, he was gazing interestedly at the high wrought-iron fence, as well as the kempt lawn within, dimly illuminated by street lamps, and upon the surface of which he could detect many heaps of freshly fallen brown leaves being shaken and rolled by a winnowing and gamboling wind. It was all so starkly severe, placid, reserved, beautiful, as he saw it, that he was quite stirred by the dignity and richness of it. And as he neared the central gate, above which two lights were burning, making a circle of light about it, a closed car of great size and solidity stopped directly in front of it. And the chauffeur stepping down and opening the door, Clyde instantly recognized Sondra Finchley leaning forward in the car.

"Go around to the side entrance, David, and tell Miriam that I can't wait for her because I'm going over to the Trumbulls for dinner, but that I'll be back by nine. If she's not there, leave this note and hurry, will you?" The voice and manner were of that imperious and yet pleasing mode which had so intrigued him the spring before.

At the same time seeing, as she thought, Gilbert Griffiths approaching along the sidewalk, she called, "Oh, hello. Walking to-night? If you want to wait a minute, you can ride out with me. I've just sent David in with a note. He won't be long."

Now Sondra Finchley, despite the fact that she was interested in Bella and the Griffiths' wealth and prestige in general was by no means as well pleased with Gilbert. He had been indifferent to her in the beginning when she had tried to culti-

vate him and he had remained so. He had wounded her pride. And to her, who was overflowing with vanity and self-conceit, this was the last offense, and she could not forgive him. She could not and would not brook the slightest trace of ego in another, and most especially the vain, cold, self-centered person of Bella's brother. He had too fine an opinion of himself, as she saw it, was one who was too bursting with vanity to be of service to anyone. "Hmp! That stick." It was so that she invariably thought of him. "Who does he think he is anyhow? He certainly does think he's a lot around here. You'd think he was a Rockefeller or a Morgan. And for my part I can't see where he's a bit interesting—any more. I like Bella. I think she's lovely. But that smarty. I guess he would like to have a girl wait on him. Well, not for me." Such in the main were the comments made by Sondra upon such reported acts and words of Gilbert as were brought to her by others.

And for his part, Gilbert, hearing of the gyrations, airs, and aspirations of Sondra from Bella from time to time, was accustomed to remark: "What, that little snip! Who does she think she is anyhow? If ever there was a conceited little nut! . . ."

However, so tightly were the social lines of Lycurgus drawn, so few the truly eligibles, that it was almost necessary and compulsory upon those "in" to make the best of such others as were "in." And so it was that she now greeted Gilbert as she thought. And as she moved over slightly from the door to make room for him, Clyde almost petrified by this unexpected recognition, and quite shaken out of his pose and self-contemplation, not being sure whether he had heard aright, now approached, his manner the epitome almost of a self-ingratiating and somewhat affectionate and wistful dog of high breeding and fine temperament.

"Oh, good evening," he exclaimed, removing his cap and bowing. "How are you?" while his mind was registering that this truly was the beautiful, the exquisite Sondra whom months before he had met at his uncle's, and concerning whose social activities during the preceding summer he had been reading in the papers. And now here she was as lovely as ever, seated in this beautiful car and addressing him, apparently. However, Sondra on the instant realizing that she had made a mistake and that it was not Gilbert, was quite embarrassed and uncertain for the moment just how to extricate herself from a situation which was a bit ticklish, to say the least.

"Oh, pardon me, you're Mr. Clyde Griffiths, I see now. It's my mistake. I thought you were Gilbert. I couldn't quite

make you out in the light." She had for the moment an embarrassed and fidgety and halting manner, which Clyde noticed and which he saw implied that she had made a mistake that was not entirely flattering to him nor satisfactory to her. And this in turn caused him to become confused and anxious to retire.

"Oh, pardon me. But that's all right. I didn't mean to intrude. I thought . . ." He flushed and stepped back really troubled.

But now Sondra, seeing at once that Clyde was if anything much more attractive than his cousin and far more diffident, and obviously greatly impressed by her charms as well as her social state, unbent sufficiently to say with a charming smile: "But that's all right. Won't you get in, please, and let me take you where you are going. Oh, I wish you would. I will be so glad to take you."

For there was that in Clyde's manner the instant he learned that it was due to a mistake that he had been recognized which caused even her to understand that he was hurt, abashed and disappointed. His eyes took on a hurt look and there was a wavering, apologetic, sorrowful smile playing about his lips.

"Why, yes, of course," he said jerkily, "that is, if you want me to. I understand how it was. That's all right. But you needn't mind, if you don't wish to. I thought . . ." He had half turned to go, but was so drawn by her that he could scarcely tear himself away before she repeated: "Oh, do come, get in, Mr. Griffiths. I'll be so glad if you will. It won't take David a moment to take you wherever you are going, I'm sure. And I am sorry about the other, really I am. I didn't mean, you know, that just because you weren't Gilbert Griffiths—"

He paused and in a bewildered manner stepped forward and entering the car, slipped into the seat beside her. And she, interested by his personality, at once began to look at him, feeling glad that it was he now instead of Gilbert. In order the better to see and again reveal her devastating charms, as she saw them, to Clyde, she now switched on the roof light. And the chauffeur returning, she asked Clyde where he wished to go—an address which he gave reluctantly enough, since it was so different from the street in which she resided. As the car sped on, he was animated by a feverish desire to make some use of this brief occasion which might cause her to think favorably of him—perhaps, who knows—lead to some faint desire on her part to contact him again at some time or other. He was so truly eager to be of her world.

"It's certainly nice of you to take me up this way," he now turned to her and observed, smiling. "I didn't think it was my cousin you meant or I wouldn't have come up as I did."

"Oh, that's all right. Don't mention it," replied Sondra archly with a kind of sicky sweetness in her voice. Her original impression of him as she now felt, had been by no means so vivid. "It's my mistake, not yours. But I'm glad I made it now, anyhow," she added most definitely and with an engaging smile. "I think I'd rather pick you up than I would Gil, anyhow. We don't get along any too well, he and I. We quarrel a lot whenever we do meet anywhere." She smiled, having completely recovered from her momentary embarrassment, and now leaned back after the best princess fashion, her glance examining Clyde's very regular features with interest. He had such soft smiling eyes she thought. And after all, as she now reasoned, he was Bella's and Gilbert's cousin, and looked prosperous.

"Well, that's too bad," he said stiffly, and with a very awkward and weak attempt at being self-confident and even high-spirited in her presence.

"Oh, it doesn't amount to anything, really. We just quarrel, that's all, once in a while."

She saw that he was nervous and bashful and decidedly unresourceful in her presence and it pleased her to think that she could thus befuddle and embarrass him so much. "Are you still working for your uncle?"

"Oh, yes," replied Clyde quickly, as though it would make an enormous difference to her if he were not. "I have charge of a department over there now."

"Oh, really, I didn't know. I haven't seen you at all, since that one time, you know. You don't get time to go about much, I suppose." She looked at him wisely, as much as to say, "Your relatives aren't so very much interested in you," but really liking him now, she said instead, "You have been in the city all summer, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes," replied Clyde quite simply and winningly. "I have to be, you know. It's the work that keeps me here. But I've seen your name in the papers often, and read about your riding and tennis contests and I saw you in that flower parade last June, too. I certainly thought you looked beautiful, like an angel almost."

There was an admiring, pleading light in his eyes which now quite charmed her. What a pleasing young man—so different to Gilbert. And to think he should be so plainly and hopelessly smitten, and when she could take no more than a passing interest

in him. It made her feel sorry, a little, and hence kindly toward him. Besides what would Gilbert think if only he knew that his cousin was so completely reduced by her—how angry he would be—he, who so plainly thought her a snip? It would serve him just right if Clyde were taken up by some one and made more of than he (Gilbert) ever could hope to be. The thought had a most pleasing tang for her.

However, at this point, unfortunately, the car turned in before Mrs. Peyton's door and stopped. The adventure for Clyde and for her was seemingly over.

"That's awfully nice of you to say that. I won't forget that." She smiled archly as, the chauffeur opening the door, Clyde stepped down, his own nerves taut because of the grandeur and import of this encounter. "So this is where you live. Do you expect to be in Lycurgus all winter?"

"Oh, yes. I'm quite sure of it. I hope to be anyhow," he added, quite yearningly, his eyes expressing his meaning completely.

"Well, perhaps, then I'll see you again somewhere, some time. I hope so, anyhow."

She nodded and gave him her fingers and the most fetching and wreathy of smiles, and he, eager to the point of folly, added: "Oh, so do I."

"Good night! Good night!" she called as the car sprang away, and Clyde, looking after it, wondered if he would ever see her again so closely and intimately as here. To think that he should have met her again in this way! And she had proved so very different from that first time when, as he distinctly recalled, she took no interest in him at all.

He turned hopefully and a little wistfully toward his own door.

And Sondra, . . . why was it, she pondered, as the motor car sped on its way, that the Griffiths were apparently not much interested in him?

CHAPTER XXIV

THE effect of this so casual contact was really disrupting in more senses than one. For now in spite of his comfort in and satisfaction with Roberta, once more and in this positive and to him entrancing way, was posed the whole question of his social possibilities here. And that strangely enough by the one girl of this upper level who had most materialized and magnified for him the meaning of that upper level itself. The beautiful Sondra Finchley! Her lovely face, smart clothes, gay and superior demeanor! If only at the time he had first encountered her he had managed to interest her. Or could now.

The fact that his relations with Roberta were what they were now was not of sufficient import or weight to offset the temperamental or imaginative pull of such a girl as Sondra and all that she represented. Just to think the Wimblinger Finchley Electric Sweeper Company was one of the largest manufacturing concerns here. Its tall walls and stacks made a part of the striking sky line across the Mohawk. And the Finchley residence in Wykeagy Avenue, near that of the Griffiths, was one of the most impressive among that distinguished row of houses which had come with the latest and most discriminating architectural taste here—Italian Renaissance—cream hued marble and Dutchess County Sandstone combined. And the Finchleys were among the most discussed of families here.

Ah, to know this perfect girl more intimately! To be looked upon by her with favor,—made, by reason of that favor, a part of that fine world to which she belonged. Was he not a Griffiths —as good looking as Gilbert Griffiths any day? And as attractive if he only had as much money—or a part of it even. To be able to dress in the Gilbert Griffiths' fashion; to ride around in one of the handsome cars he sported! Then, you bet, a girl like this would be delighted to notice him,—mayhap, who knows, even fall in love with him. Analschar and the tray of glasses. But now, as he gloomily thought, he could only hope, hope, hope.

The devil! He would not go around to Roberta's this evening. He would trump up some excuse—tell her in the morning that he had been called upon by his uncle or cousin to do some

work. He could not and would not go, feeling as he did just now.

So much for the effect of wealth, beauty, the peculiar social state to which he most aspired, on a temperament that was as fluid and unstable as water.

On the other hand, later, thinking over her contact with Clyde, Sondra was definitely taken with what may only be described as his charm for her, all the more definite in this case since it represented a direct opposite to all that his cousin offered by way of offense. His clothes and his manner, as well as a remark he had dropped, to the effect that he was connected with the company in some official capacity, seemed to indicate that he might be better placed than she had imagined. Yet she also recalled that although she had been about with Bella all summer and had encountered Gilbert, Myra and their parents from time to time, there had never been a word about Clyde. Indeed all the information she had gathered concerning him was that originally furnished by Mrs. Griffiths, who had said that he was a poor nephew whom her husband had brought on from the west in order to help in some way. Yet now, as she viewed Clyde on this occasion, he did not seem so utterly unimportant or poverty-stricken by any means—quite interesting and rather smart and very attractive, and obviously anxious to be taken seriously by a girl like herself, as she could see. And this coming from Gilbert's cousin—a Griffiths—was flattering.

Arriving at the Trumbulls, a family which centered about one Douglas Trumbull, a prosperous lawyer and widower and speculator of this region, who, by reason of his children as well as his own good manners and legal subtlety, had managed to ingratiate himself into the best circles of Lycurgus society, she suddenly confided to Jill Trumbull, the elder of the lawyer's two daughters: "You know I had a funny experience to-day." And she proceeded to relate all that had occurred in detail. Afterward at dinner, Jill having appeared to find it most fascinating, she again repeated it to Gertrude and Tracy, the younger daughter and only son of the Trumbull family.

"Oh, yes," observed Tracy Trumbull, a law student in his father's office, "I've seen that fellow, I bet, three or four times on Central Avenue. He looks a lot like Gil, doesn't he? Only not so swagger. I've nodded to him two or three times this summer because I thought he was Gil for the moment."

"Oh, I've seen him, too," commented Gertrude Trumbull. "He wears a cap and a belted coat like Gilbert Griffiths, sometimes, doesn't he? Arabella Stark pointed him out to me once

and then Jill and I saw him passing Stark's once on a Saturday afternoon. He is better looking than Gil, any day, I think."

This confirmed Sondra in her own thoughts in regard to Clyde and now she added: "Bertine Cranston and I met him one evening last spring at the Griffiths. We thought he was too bashful, then. But I wish you could see him now—he's positively handsome, with the softest eyes and the nicest smile."

"Oh, now, Sondra," commented Jill Trumbull, who, apart from Bertine and Bella, was as close to Sondra as any girl here, having been one of her classmates at the Snedeker School, "I know some one who would be jealous if he could hear you say that."

"And wouldn't Gil Griffiths like to hear that his cousin's better looking than he is?" chimed in Tracy Trumbull. "Oh, say—"

"Oh, he," sniffed Sondra irritably. "He thinks he's so much. I'll bet anything it's because of him that the Griffiths won't have anything to do with their cousin. I'm sure of it, now that I think of it. Bella would, of course, because I heard her say last spring that she thought he was good-looking. And Myra wouldn't do anything to hurt anybody. What a lark if some of us were to take him up some time and begin inviting him here and there—once in a while, you know—just for fun, to see how he would do. And how the Griffiths would take it. I know well enough it would be all right with Mr. Griffiths and Myra and Bella, but Gil I'll bet would be as peeved as anything. I couldn't do it myself very well, because I'm so close to Bella, but I know who could and they couldn't say a thing." She paused, thinking of Bertine Cranston and how she disliked Gil and Mrs. Griffiths. "I wonder if he dances or rides or plays tennis or anything like that?" She stopped and meditated amusedly, the while the others studied her. And Jill Trumbull, a restless, eager girl like herself, without so much of her looks or flare, however, observed: "It would be a prank, wouldn't it? Do you suppose the Griffiths really would dislike it very much?"

"What's the difference if they did?" went on Sondra. "They couldn't do anything more than ignore him, could they? And who would care about that, I'd like to know. Not the people who invited him."

"Go on, you fellows, stir up a local scrap, will you?" put in Tracy Trumbull. "I'll bet anything that's what comes of it in the end. Gil Griffiths won't like it, you can gamble on that. I wouldn't if I were in his position. If you want to stir up a

lot of feeling here, go to it, but I'll lay a bet that's what it comes to."

Now Sondra Finchley's nature was of just such a turn that a thought of this kind was most appealing to her. However, as interesting as the idea was to her at the time, nothing definite might have come of it, had it not been that subsequent to this conversation and several others held with Bertine Cranston, Jill Trumbull, Patricia Anthony, and Arabella Stark, the news of this adventure, together with some comments as to himself, finally came to the ears of Gilbert Griffiths, yet only via Constance Wynant to whom, as local gossips would have it, he was prospectively engaged. And Constance, hoping that Gilbert would marry her eventually, was herself irritated by the report that Sondra had chosen to interest herself in Clyde, and then, for no sane reason, as she saw it, proclaim that he was more attractive than Gilbert. So, as much to relieve herself as to lay some plan of avenging herself upon Sondra, if possible, she conveyed the whole matter in turn to Gilbert, who at once proceeded to make various cutting references to Clyde and Sondra. And these carried back to Sondra, along with certain embellishments by Constance, had the desired effect. It served to awaken in her the keenest desire for retaliation. For if she chose she certainly could be nice to Clyde, and have others be nice to him, too. And that would mean perhaps that Gilbert would find himself faced by a social rival of sorts—his own cousin, too, who, even though he was poor, might come to be liked better. What a lark! At the very same time there came to her a way by which she might most easily introduce Clyde, and yet without seeming so to do, and without any great harm to herself, if it did not terminate as she wished.

For in Lycurgus among the younger members of those smarter families whose children had been to the Snedeker School, existed a rather illusory and casual dinner and dance club called the "Now and Then." It had no definite organization, officers or abode. Any one, who, because of class and social connections was eligible and chose to belong, could call a meeting of other members to give a dinner or dance or tea in their homes.

And how simple, thought Sondra in browsing around for a suitable vehicle by which to introduce Clyde, if some one other than herself who belonged could be induced to get up something and then at her suggestion invite Clyde. How easy, say, for Jill Trumbull to give a dinner and dance to the "Now and Thens," to which Clyde might be invited. And by this ruse

she would thus be able to see him again and find out just how much he did interest her and what he was like.

Accordingly a small dinner for this club and its friends was announced for the first Thursday in December, Jill Trumbull to be the hostess. To it were to be invited Sondra and her brother, Stuart, Tracy and Gertrude Trumbull, Arabella Stark, Bertine and her brother, and some others from Utica and Gloversville as well. And Clyde. But in order to safeguard Clyde against any chance of failure or even invidious comment of any kind, not only she but Bertine and Jill and Gertrude were to be attentive to and considerate of him. They were to see that his dance program was complete and that neither at dinner nor on the dance floor was he to be left to himself, but was to be passed on most artfully from one to the other until the evening should be over. For, by reason of that, others might come to be interested in him, which would not only take the thorn from the thought that Sondra alone, of all the better people of Lycurgus, had been friendly to him, but would sharpen the point of this development for Gilbert, if not for Bella and the other members of the Griffiths family.

And in accordance with this plan, so it was done.

And so it was that Clyde, returning from the factory one early December evening about two weeks after his encounter with Sondra, was surprised by the sight of a cream-colored note leaning against the mirror of his dresser. It was addressed in a large, scrawly and unfamiliar hand. He picked it up and turned it over without being able in any way to fix upon the source. On the back were the initials B. T. or J. T., he could not decide which, so elaborately intertwined was the engraved penmanship. He tore it open and drew out a card which read:

The Now and Then Club
Will Hold Its First
Winter Dinner Dance
At the Home of
Douglas Trumbull
135 Wykeagy Ave.
On Thursday, December 4
You Are Cordially Invited
Will You Kindly Reply to Miss Jill Trumbull?

On the back of this, though, in the same scrawly hand that graced the envelope was written: "Dear Mr. Griffiths: Thought you might like to come. It will be quite informal. And I'm

sure you'll like it. If so, will you let Jill Trumbull know? Sondra Finchley."

Quite amazed and thrilled, Clyde stood and stared. For ever since that second contact with her, he had been more definitely fascinated than at any time before by the dream that somehow, in some way, he was to be lifted from the lowly state in which he now dwelt. He was, as he now saw it, really too good for the commonplace world by which he was environed. And now here was this—a social invitation issued by the "Now and Then Club," of which, even though he had never heard of it, must be something, since it was sponsored by such exceptional people. And on the back of it, was there not the writing of Sondra herself? How marvelous, really!

So astonished was he that he could scarcely contain himself for joy, but now on the instant must walk to and fro, looking at himself in the mirror, washing his hands and face, then deciding that his tie was not just right, perhaps, and changing to another—thinking forward to what he should wear and back upon how Sondra had looked at him on that last occasion. And how she had smiled. At the same time he could not help wondering even at this moment of what Roberta would think, if now, by some extra optical power of observation she could note his present joy in connection with this note. For plainly, and because he was no longer governed by the conventional notions of his parents, he had been allowing himself to drift into a position in regard to her which would certainly spell torture to her in case she should discover the nature of his present mood, a thought which puzzled him not a little, but did not serve to modify his thoughts in regard to Sondra in the least.

That wonderful girl!

That beauty!

That world of wealth and social position she lived in!

At the same time so innately pagan and unconventional were his thoughts in regard to all this that he could now ask himself, and that seriously enough, why should he not be allowed to direct his thoughts toward her and away from Roberta, since at the moment Sondra supplied the keener thought of delight. Roberta could not know about this. She could not see into his mind, could she—become aware of any such extra experience as this unless he told her. And most assuredly he did not intend to tell her. And what harm, he now asked himself, was there in a poor youth like himself aspiring to such heights? Other youths as poor as himself had married girls as rich as Sondra.

For in spite of all that had occurred between him and Roberta

he had not, as he now clearly recalled, given her his word that he would marry her except under one condition. And such a condition, especially with the knowledge that he had all too clearly acquired in Kansas City, was not likely to happen as he thought.

And Sondra, now that she had thus suddenly burst upon him again in this way was the same as a fever to his fancy. This goddess in her shrine of gilt and tinsel so utterly enticing to him, had deigned to remember him in this open and direct way and to suggest that he be invited. And no doubt she, herself, was going to be there, a thought which thrilled him beyond measure.

And what would not Gilbert and the Griffiths think if they were to hear of his going to this affair now, as they surely would? Or meet him later at some other party to which Sondra might invite him? Think of that! Would it irritate or please them? Make them think less or more of him? For, after all, this certainly was not of his doing. Was he not properly invited by people of their own station here in Lycurgus whom most certainly they were compelled to respect? And by no device of his, either—sheer accident—the facts concerning which would most certainly not reflect on him as pushing. As lacking as he was in some of the finer shades of mental discrimination, a sly and ironic pleasure lay in the thought that now Gilbert and the Griffiths might be compelled to countenance him whether they would or not—invite him to their home, even. For, if these others did, how could they avoid it, really? Oh, joy! And that in the face of Gilbert's high contempt for him. He fairly chuckled as he thought of it, feeling that however much Gilbert might resent it, neither his uncle nor Myra were likely to, and that hence he would be fairly safe from any secret desire on the part of Gilbert to revenge himself on him for this.

But how wonderful this invitation! Why that intriguing scribble of Sondra's unless she was interested in him some? Why? The thought was so thrilling that Clyde could scarcely eat his dinner that night. He took up the card and kissed the handwriting. And instead of going to see Roberta as usual, he decided as before on first reëncountering her, to walk a bit, then return to his room, and retire early. And on the morrow as before he could make some excuse—say that he had been over to the Griffiths' home, or some one of the heads of the factory, in order to listen to an explanation in regard to something in connection with the work, since there were often such conferences. For, in the face of this, he did not care to see or talk to Roberta this night. He could not. The other thought—that of Sondra and her interest in him—was too enticing.

CHAPTER XXV

BUT in the interim, in connection with his relations with Roberta no least reference to Sondra, although, even when near her in the factory or her room, he could not keep his thoughts from wandering away to where Sondra in her imaginary high social world might be. The while Roberta, at moments only sensing a drift and remoteness in his thought and attitude which had nothing to do with her, was wondering what it was that of late was beginning to occupy him so completely. And he, in his turn, when she was not looking was thinking—supposing?—supposing—(since she had troubled to recall herself to him), that he could interest a girl like Sondra in him? What then of Roberta? What? And in the face of this intimate relation that had now been established between them? (Goodness! The deuce!) And that he did care for her (yes, he did), although now—basking in the direct rays of this newer luminary—he could scarcely see Roberta any longer, so strong were the actinic rays of this other. Was he all wrong? Was it evil to be like this? His mother would say so! And his father too—and perhaps everybody who thought right about life—Sondra Finchley, maybe—the Griffiths—all.

And yet! And yet! It was snowing the first light snow of the year as Clyde, arrayed in a new collapsible silk hat and white silk muffler, both suggested by a friendly haberdasher—Orrin Short, with whom recently he had come in contact here—and a new silk umbrella wherewith to protect himself from the snow, made his way toward the very interesting, if not so very imposing residence of the Trumbulls on Wykeagy Avenue. It was quaint, low and rambling, and the lights beaming from within upon the many drawn blinds gave it a Christmas-card effect. And before it, even at the prompt hour at which he arrived, were ranged a half dozen handsome cars of various builds and colors. The sight of them, sprinkled on tops, running boards and fenders with the fresh, flaky snow, gave him a keen sense of a deficiency that was not likely soon to be remedied in his case—the want of ample means wherewith to equip himself with such a necessity as that. And inside as he approached the door he could hear voices, laughter and conversation commingled.

A tall, thin servant relieved him of his hat, coat and umbrella

and he found himself face to face with Jill Trumbull, who apparently was on the look-out for him—a smooth, curly-haired blonde girl, not too thrillingly pretty, but brisk and smart, in white satin with arms and shoulders bare and rhinestones banded around her forehead.

"No trouble to tell who you are," she said gayly, approaching and giving Clyde her hand. "I'm Jill Trumbull. Miss Finchley hasn't come yet. But I can do the honors just as well, I guess. Come right in where the rest of us are."

She led the way into a series of connecting rooms that seemed to join each other at right angles, adding as she went, "You do look an awful lot like Gil Griffiths, don't you?"

"Do I?" smiled Clyde simply and courageously and very much flattered by the comparison.

The ceilings were low. Pretty lamps behind painted shades hugged dark walls. Open fires in two connecting rooms cast a rosy glow upon cushioned and comfortable furniture. There were pictures, books, objects of art.

"Here, Tracy, you do the announcing, will you?" she called. "My brother, Tracy Trumbull, Mr. Griffiths. Mr. Clyde Griffiths, everybody," she added, surveying the company in general which in turn fixed varying eyes upon him, while Tracy Trumbull took him by the hand. Clyde, suffering from a sense of being studied, nevertheless achieved a warm smile. At the same time he realized that for the moment at least conversation had stopped. "Don't all stop talking on my account," he ventured, with a smile, which caused most of those present to conceive of him as at his ease and resourceful. At the same time Tracy added: "I'm not going to do any man-to-man introduction stuff. We'll stand right here and point 'em out. That's my sister, Gertrude, over there talking to Scott Nicholson." Clyde noted that a small, dark girl dressed in pink with a pretty and yet saucy and piquant face, nodded to him. And beside her a very de rigueur youth of fine physique and pink complexion nodded jerkily. "Howja do." And a few feet from them near a deep window stood a tall and yet graceful girl of dark and by no means ravishing features talking to a broad-shouldered and deep-chested youth of less than her height, who were proclaimed to be Arabella Stark and Frank Harriet. "They're arguing over a recent Cornell-Syracuse foot-ball game . . . Burchard Taylor and Miss Phant of Utica," he went on almost too swiftly for Clyde to assemble any mental notes. "Perley Haynes and Miss Vanda Steele . . . well, I guess that's all as yet. Oh, no, here come Grant and Nina Temple." Clyde paused

and gazed as a tall and somewhat dandified-looking youth, sharp of face and with murky gray eyes, steered a trim, young, plump girl in fawn gray and with a light chestnut braid of hair laid carefully above her forehead, into the middle of the room.

"Hello, Jill. Hello, Vanda. Hello, Wynette." In the midst of these greetings on his part, Clyde was presented to these two, neither of whom seemed to pay much attention to him. "Didn't think we'd make it," went on young Cranston speaking to all at once. "Nina didn't want to come, but I promised Bertine and Jill or I wouldn't have, either. We were up at the Bagley's. Guess who's up there, Scott. Van Peterson and Rhoda Hull. They're just over for the day."

"You don't say," called Scott Nicholson, a determined and self-centered looking individual. Clyde was arrested by the very definite sense of social security and ease that seemed to reside in everybody. "Why didn't you bring 'em along? I'd like to see Rhoda again and Van, too."

"Couldn't. They have to go back early, they say. They may stop in later for a minute. Gee, isn't dinner served yet? I expected to sit right down."

"These lawyers! Don't you know they don't eat often?" commented Frank Harriet, who was a short, but broad-chested and smiling youth, very agreeable, very good-looking and with even, white teeth. Clyde liked him.

"Well, whether they do or not, we do, or out I go. Did you hear who is being touted for stroke next year over at Cornell?" This college chatter relating to Cornell and shared by Harriet, Cranston and others, Clyde could not understand. He had scarcely heard of the various colleges with which this group was all too familiar. At the same time he was wise enough to sense the defect and steer clear of any questions or conversations which might relate to them. However, because of this, he at once felt out of it. These people were better informed than he was—had been to colleges. Perhaps he had better claim that he had been to some school. In Kansas City he had heard of the State University of Kansas—not so very far from there. Also the University of Missouri. And in Chicago of the University of Chicago. Could he say that he had been to one of those—that Kansas one, for a little while, anyway? On the instant he proposed to claim it, if asked, and then look up afterwards what, if anything, he was supposed to know about it—what, for instance, he might have studied. He had heard of mathematics somewhere. Why not that?

But these people, as he could see, were too much interested

in themselves to pay much attention to him now. He might be a Griffiths and important to some outside, but here not so much —a matter of course, as it were. And because Tracy Trumbull for the moment had turned to say something to Wynette Phant, he felt quite alone, beached and helpless and with no one to talk to. But just then the small, dark girl, Gertrude, came over to him.

"The crowd's a little late in getting together. It always is. If we said eight, they'd come at eight-thirty or nine. Isn't that always the way?"

"It certainly is," replied Clyde gratefully, endeavoring to appear as brisk and as much at ease as possible.

"I'm Gertrude Trumbull," she repeated. "The sister of the good-looking Jill," a cynical and yet amused smile played about her mouth and eyes. "You nodded to me, but you don't know me. Just the same we've been hearing a lot about you." She teased in an attempt to trouble Clyde a little, if possible. "A mysterious Griffiths here in Lycurgus whom no one seems to have met. I saw you once in Central Avenue, though. You were going into Rich's candy store. You didn't know that, though. Do you like candy?"

"Oh, yes, I like candy. Why?" asked Clyde on the instant feeling teased and disturbed, since the girl for whom he was buying the candy was Roberta. At the same time he could not help feeling slightly more at ease with this girl than with some others, for although cynical and not so attractive, her manner was genial and she now spelled escape from isolation and hence diffidence.

"You're probably just saying that," she laughed, a bantering look in her eyes. "More likely you were buying it for some girl. You have a girl, haven't you?"

"Why—" Clyde paused for the fraction of a second because as she asked this Roberta came into his mind and the query, "Had any one ever seen him with Roberta?" flitted through his brain. Also thinking at the same time, what a bold, teasing, intelligent girl this was, different from any that thus far he had known. Yet quite without more pause he added: "No, I haven't. What makes you ask that?"

As he said this there came to him the thought of what Roberta would think if she could hear him. "But what a question," he continued a little nervously now. "You like to tease, don't you?"

"Who, me? Oh, no. I wouldn't do anything like that. But I'm sure you have just the same. I like to ask questions some-

times, just to see what people will say when they don't want you to know what they really think." She beamed into Clyde's eyes amusedly and defiantly. "But I know you have a girl just the same. All good-looking fellows have."

"Oh, am I good-looking?" he beamed nervously, amused and yet pleased. "Who said so?"

"As though you didn't know. Well, different people. I for one. And Sondra Finchley thinks you're good-looking, too. She's only interested in men who are. So does my sister Jill, for that matter. And she only likes men who are good-looking. I'm different because I'm not so good-looking myself." She blinked cynically and teasingly into his eyes, which caused him to feel oddly out of place, not able to cope with such a girl at all, at the same time very much flattered and amused. "But don't you think you're better looking than your cousin," she went on sharply and even commandingly. "Some people think you are."

Although a little staggered and yet flattered by this question which propounded what he might have liked to believe, and although intrigued by this girl's interest in him, still Clyde would not have dreamed of venturing any such assertion even though he had believed it. Too vividly it brought the aggressive and determined and even at times revengeful-looking features of Gilbert before him, who, stirred by such a report as this, would not hesitate to pay him out.

"Why I don't think anything of the kind," he laughed. "Honest, I don't. Of course I don't."

"Oh, well, then maybe you don't, but you are just the same. But that won't help you much either, unless you have money —that is, if you want to run with people who have." She looked up at him and added quite blandly. "People like money even more than they do looks."

What a sharp girl this was, he thought, and what a hard, cold statement. It cut him not a little, even though she had not intended that it should.

But just then Sondra herself entered with some youth whom Clyde did not know—a tall, gangling, but very smartly-dressed individual. And after them, along with others, Bertine and Stuart Finchley.

"Here she is now," added Gertrude a little spitefully, for she resented the fact that Sondra was so much better-looking than either she or her sister, and that she had expressed an interest in Clyde. "She'll be looking to see if you notice how pretty she looks, so don't disappoint her."

The impact of this remark, a reflection of the exact truth, was not necessary to cause Clyde to gaze attentively, and even eagerly. For apart from her local position and means and taste in dress and manners, Sondra was of the exact order and spirit that most intrigued him—a somewhat refined (and because of means and position showered upon her) less savage, although scarcely less self-centered, Hortense Briggs. She was, in her small, intense way, a seeking Aphrodite, eager to prove to any who were sufficiently attractive the destroying power of her charm, while at the same time retaining her own personality and individuality free of any entangling alliance or compromise. However, for varying reasons which she could not quite explain to herself, Clyde appealed to her. He might not be anything socially or financially, but he was interesting to her.

Hence she was now keen, first to see if he were present, next to be sure that he gained no hint that she had seen him first, and lastly to act as grandly as possible for his benefit—a Hortensian procedure and type of thought that was exactly the thing best calculated to impress him. He gazed and there she was—tripping here and there in a filmy chiffon dance frock, shaded from palest yellow to deepest orange, which most enhanced her dark eyes and hair. And having exchanged a dozen or more "Oh, Hellos," and references with one and another to this, that and the other local event, she at last condescended to evince awareness of his proximity.

"Oh, here you are. You decided to come after all. I wasn't sure whether you would think it worth while. You've been introduced to everybody, of course?" She looked around as much as to say, that if he had not been she would proceed to serve him in this way. The others, not so very much impressed by Clyde, were still not a little interested by the fact that she seemed so interested in him.

"Yes, I met nearly everybody, I think."

"Except Freddie Sells. He came in with me just now. Here you are, Freddie," she called to a tall and slender youth, smooth of cheek and obviously becurled as to hair, who now came over and in his closely-fitting dress coat looked down on Clyde about as a spring rooster might look down on a sparrow.

"This is Clyde Griffiths, I was telling you about, Fred," she began briskly. "Doesn't he look a lot like Gilbert?"

"Why, you do at that," exclaimed this amiable person, who seemed to be slightly troubled with weak eyes since he bent close. "I hear you're a cousin of Gil's. I know him well. We went through Princeton together. I used to be over here be-

fore I joined the General Electric over at Schenectady. But I'm around a good bit yet. You're connected with the factory, I suppose."

"Yes, I am," said Clyde, who, before a youth of obviously so much more training and schooling than he possessed, felt not a little reduced. He began to fear that this individual would try to talk to him about things which he could not understand, things concerning which, having had no consecutive training of any kind, he had never been technically informed.

"In charge of some department, I suppose?"

"Yes, I am," said Clyde, cautiously and nervously.

"You know," went on Mr. Sells, briskly and interestingly, being of a commercial as well as technical turn, "I've always wondered just what, outside of money, there is to the collar business. Gil and I used to argue about that when we were down at college. He used to try to tell me that there was some social importance to making and distributing collars, giving polish and manner to people who wouldn't otherwise have them, if it weren't for cheap collars. I think he musta read that in a book somewhere. I always laughed at him."

Clyde was about to attempt an answer, although already beyond his depth in regard to this. "Social importance." Just what did he mean by that—some deep, scientific information that he had acquired at college. He was saved a non-committal or totally uninformed answer by Sondra who, without thought or knowledge of the difficulty which was then and there before him, exclaimed: "Oh, no arguments, Freddie. That's not interesting. Besides I want him to meet my brother and Bertine. You remember Miss Cranston. She was with me at your uncle's last spring."

Clyde turned, while Fred made the best of the rebuff by merely looking at Sondra, whom he admired so very much.

"Yes, of course," Clyde began, for he had been studying these two along with others. To him, apart from Sondra, Bertine seemed exceedingly attractive, though quite beyond his understanding also. Being involved, insincere and sly, she merely evoked in him a troubled sense of ineffectiveness, and hence uncertainty, in so far as her particular world was concerned—no more.

"Oh, how do you do? It's nice to see you again," she drawled, the while her greenish-gray eyes went over him in a smiling and yet indifferent and quizzical way. She thought him attractive, but not nearly as shrewd and hard as she would have preferred him to be. "You've been terribly busy with your

work, I suppose. But now that you've come out once, I suppose we'll see more of you here and there."

"Well, I hope so," he replied, showing his even teeth.

Her eyes seemed to be saying that she did not believe what she was saying and that he did not either, but that it was necessary, possibly amusing, to say something of the sort.

And a related, though somewhat modified, version of this same type of treatment was accorded him by Stuart, Sondra's brother.

"Oh, how do you do. Glad to know you. My sister has just been telling me about you. Going to stay in Lycurgus long? Hope you do. We'll run into one another once in a while then, I suppose."

Clyde was by no means so sure, but he admired the easy, shallow way in which Stuart laughed and showed his even white teeth—a quick, genial, indifferent laugh. Also the way in which he turned and laid hold of Wynette Phant's white arm as she passed. "Wait a minute, Wyn. I want to ask you something." He was gone—into another room—bending close to her and talking fast. And Clyde had noticed that his clothes were perfectly cut.

What a gay world, he thought. What a brisk world. And just then Jill Trumbull began calling, "Come on, people. It's not my fault. The cook's mad about something and you're all late anyhow. We'll get it over with and then dance, eh?"

"You can sit between me and Miss Trumbull when she gets the rest of us seated," assured Sondra. "Won't that be nice? And now you may take me in."

She slipped a white arm under Clyde's and he felt as though he were slowly but surely being transported to paradise.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE dinner itself was chatter about a jumble of places, personalities, plans, most of which had nothing to do with anything that Clyde had personally contacted here. However, by reason of his own charm, he soon managed to overcome the sense of strangeness and hence indifference in some quarters, more particularly the young women of the group who were interested by the fact that Sondra Finchley liked him. And Jill Trumbull, sitting beside him, wanted to know where he came from, what his own home life and connections were like, why he had decided to come to Lycurgus, questions which, interjected as they were between silly banter concerning different girls and their beaus, gave Clyde pause. He did not feel that he could admit the truth in connection with his family at all. So he announced that his father conducted a hotel in Denver—not so very large, but still a hotel. Also that he had come to Lycurgus because his uncle had suggested to him in Chicago that he come to learn the collar business. He was not sure that he was wholly interested in it or that he would continue indefinitely unless it proved worth while; rather he was trying to find out what it might mean to his future, a remark which caused Sondra, who was also listening, as well as Jill, to whom it was addressed, to consider that in spite of all rumors attributed to Gilbert, Clyde must possess some means and position to which, in case he did not do so well here, he could return.

This in itself was important, not only to Sondra and Jill, but to all the others. For, despite his looks and charm and family connections here, the thought that he was a mere nobody, seeking, as Constance Wynant had reported, to attach himself to his cousin's family, was disquieting. One couldn't ever be anything much more than friendly with a moneyless clerk or pensioner, whatever his family connections, whereas if he had a little money and some local station elsewhere, the situation was entirely different.

And now Sondra, relieved by this and the fact that he was proving more acceptable than she had imagined he would, was inclined to make more of him than she otherwise would have done.

"Are you going to let me dance with you after dinner?" was one of the first things he said to her, infringing on a genial smile given him in the midst of clatter concerning an approaching dance somewhere.

"Why, yes, of course, if you want me to," she replied, coquettishly, seeking to intrigue him into further romanticisms in regard to her.

"Just one?"

"How many do you want? There are a dozen boys here, you know. Did you get a program when you came in?"

"I didn't see any."

"Never mind. After dinner you can get one. And you may put me down for three and eight. That will leave you room for others." She smiled bewitchingly. "You have to be nice to everybody, you know."

"Yes, I know." He was still looking at her. "But ever since I saw you at my uncle's last April, I've been wishing I might see you again. I always look for your name in the papers."

He looked at her seekingly and questioningly and in spite of herself, Sondra was captivated by this naïve confession. Plainly he could not afford to go where or do what she did, but still he would trouble to follow her name and movements in print. She could not resist the desire to make something more of this.

"Oh, do you?" she added. "Isn't that nice? But what do you read about me?"

"That you were at Twelfth and Greenwood Lakes and up at Sharon for the swimming contests. I saw where you went up to Paul Smith's, too. The papers here seemed to think you were interested in some one from Schroon Lake and that you might be going to marry him."

"Oh, did they? How silly. The papers here always say such silly things." Her tone implied that he might be intruding. He looked embarrassed. This softened her and after a moment she took up the conversation in the former vein.

"Do you like to ride?" she asked sweetly and placatively.

"I never have. You know I never had much chance at that, but I always thought I could if I tried."

"Of course, it's not hard. If you took a lesson or two you could, and," she added in a somewhat lower tone, "we might go for a canter sometime. There are lots of horses in our stable that you would like, I'm sure."

Clyde's hair-roots tingled anticipatorily. He was actually being invited by Sondra to ride with her sometime and he could use one of her horses into the bargain.

"Oh, I would love that," he said. "That would be wonderful."

The crowd was getting up from the table. Scarcely any one was interested in the dinner, because a chamber orchestra of four having arrived, the strains of a preliminary fox trot were already issuing from the adjacent living room—a long, wide affair from which all obstructing furniture with the exception of wall chairs had been removed.

"You had better see about your program and your dance before all the others are gone," cautioned Sondra.

"Yes, I will right away," said Clyde, "but is two all I get with you?"

"Well, make it three, five and eight then, in the first half." She waved him gaily away and he hurried for a dance card.

The dances were all of the eager fox-trotting type of the period with interpolations and variations according to the moods and temperaments of the individual dancers. Having danced so much with Roberta during the preceding month, Clyde was in excellent form and keyed to the breaking point by the thought that at last he was in social and even affectional contact with a girl as wonderful as Sondra.

And although wishing to seem courteous and interested in others with whom he was dancing, he was almost dizzied by passing contemplations of Sondra. She swayed so droopily and dreamily in the embrace of Grant Cranston, the while without seeming to, looking in his direction when he was near, permitting him to sense how graceful and romantic and poetic was her attitude toward all things—what a flower of life she really was. And Nina Temple, with whom he was now dancing for his benefit, just then observed: "She is graceful, isn't she?"

"Who?" asked Clyde, pretending an innocence he could not physically verify, for his cheek and forehead flushed. "I don't know who you mean."

"Don't you? Then what are you blushing for?"

He had realized that he was blushing. And that his attempted escape was ridiculous. He turned, but just then the music stopped and the dancers drifted away to their chairs. Sondra moved off with Grant Cranston and Clyde led Nina toward a cushioned seat in a window in the library.

And in connection with Bertine with whom he next danced, he found himself slightly flustered by the cool, cynical aloofness with which she accepted and entertained his attention. Her chief interest in Clyde was the fact that Sondra appeared to find him interesting.

"You do dance well, don't you? I suppose you must have done a lot of dancing before you came here—in Chicago, wasn't it, or where?"

She talked slowly and indifferently.

"I was in Chicago before I came here, but I didn't do so very much dancing. I had to work." He was thinking how such girls as she had everything, as contrasted with girls like Roberta, who had nothing. And yet, as he now felt in this instance, he liked Roberta better. She was sweeter and warmer and kinder—not so cold.

When the music started again with the sonorous melancholy of a single saxophone interjected at times, Sondra came over to him and placed her right hand in his left and allowed him to put his arm about her waist, an easy, genial and unembarrassed approach which, in the midst of Clyde's dream of her, was thrilling.

And then in her coquettish and artful way she smiled up in his eyes, a bland, deceptive and yet seemingly promising smile, which caused his heart to beat faster and his throat to tighten. Some delicate perfume that she was using thrilled in his nostrils as might have the fragrance of spring.

"Having a good time?"

"Yes—looking at you."

"When there are so many other nice girls to look at?"

"Oh, there are no other girls as nice as you."

"And I dance better than any other girl, and I'm much the best-looking of any other girl here. Now—I've said it all for you. Now what are you going to say?"

She looked up at him teasingly, and Clyde realizing that he had a very different type to Roberta to deal with, was puzzled and flushed.

"I see," he said, seriously. "Every fellow tells you that, so you don't want me to."

"Oh, no, not every fellow." Sondra was at once intrigued and checkmated by the simplicity of his retort. "There are lots of people who don't think I'm very pretty."

"Oh, don't they, though?" he returned quite gayly, for at once he saw that she was not making fun of him. And yet he was almost afraid to venture another compliment. Instead he cast about for something else to say, and going back to the conversation at the table concerning riding and tennis, he now asked: "You like everything out-of-doors and athletic, don't you?"

"Oh, do I?" was her quick and enthusiastic response. "There isn't anything I like as much, really. I'm just crazy about riding,

tennis, swimming, motor-boating, aqua-planing. You swim, don't you?"

"Oh, sure," said Clyde, grandly.

"Do you play tennis?"

"Well, I've just taken it up," he said, fearing to admit that he did not play at all.

"Oh, I just love tennis. We might play sometime together."

Clyde's spirits were completely restored by this. And tripping as lightly as dawn to the mournful strains of a popular love song, she went right on. "Bella Griffiths and Stuart and Grant and I play fine doubles. We won nearly all the finals at Greenwood and Twelfth Lake last summer. And when it comes to aqua-planing and high diving you just ought to see me. We have the swiftest motor-boat up at Twelfth Lake now—Stuart has. It can do sixty miles an hour."

At once Clyde realized that he had hit upon the one subject that not only fascinated, but even excited her. For not only did it involve outdoor exercise, in which obviously she reveled, but also the power to triumph and so achieve laurels in such phases of sport as most interested those with whom she was socially connected. And lastly, although this was something which he did not so clearly realize until later, she was fairly dizzied by the opportunity all this provided for frequent changes of costume and hence social show, which was the one thing above all others that did interest her. How she looked in a bathing suit—a riding or tennis or dancing or automobile costume!

They danced on together, thrilled for the moment at least, by this mutual recognition of the identity and reality of this interest each felt for the other—a certain momentary warmth or enthusiasm which took the form of genial and seeking glances into each other's eyes, hints on the part of Sondra that, assuming that Clyde could fit himself athletically, financially and in other ways for such a world as this, it might be possible that he would be invited here and there by her; broad and for the moment self-deluding notions on his part that such could and would be the case, while in reality just below the surface of his outward or seeming conviction and assurance ran a deeper current of self-distrust which showed as a decidedly eager and yet slightly mournful light in his eye, a certain vigor and assurance in his voice, which was nevertheless touched, had she been able to define it, with something that was not assurance by any means.

"Oh, the dance is done," he said sadly.

"Let's try to make them encore," she said, applauding. The

orchestra struck up a lively tune and they glided off together once more, dipping and swaying here and there—harmoniously abandoning themselves to the rhythm of the music—like two small chips being tossed about on a rough but friendly sea.

"Oh, I'm so glad to be with you again—to be dancing with you. It's so wonderful . . . Sondra."

"But you mustn't call me that, you know. You don't know me well enough."

"I mean Miss Finchley. But you're not going to be mad at me again, are you?"

His face was very pale and sad again.

She noticed it.

"No. Was I mad at you? I wasn't really. I like you . . . some . . . when you're not sentimental."

The music stopped. The light tripping feet became walking ones.

"I'd like to see if it's still snowing outside, wouldn't you?" It was Sondra asking.

"Oh, yes. Let's go."

Through the moving couples they hurried out a side-door to a world that was covered thick with soft, cottony, silent snow. The air was filled with it silently eddying down.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE ensuing December days brought to Clyde some pleasing and yet complicating and disturbing developments. For Sondra Finchley, having found him so agreeable an admirer of hers, was from the first inclined neither to forget nor neglect him. But, occupying the rather prominent social position which she did, she was at first rather dubious as to how to proceed. For Clyde was too poor and decidedly too much ignored by the Griffiths themselves, even, for her to risk any marked manifestation of interest in him.

And now, in addition to the primary motivating reason for all this—her desire to irritate Gilbert by being friends with his cousin—there was another. She liked him. His charm and his reverence for her and her station flattered and intrigued her. For hers was a temperament which required adulation in about the measure which Clyde provided it—sincere and romantic adulation. And at the very same time he represented physical as well as mental attributes which were agreeable to her—amorousness without the courage at the time, anyhow, to annoy her too much; reverence which yet included her as a very human being; a mental and physical animation which quite matched and companioned her own.

Hence it was decidedly a troublesome thought with Sondra how she was to proceed with Clyde without attracting too much attention and unfavorable comment to herself—a thought which kept her sly little brain going at nights after she had retired. However, those who had met him at the Trumbulls' were so much impressed by her interest in him that evening and the fact that he had proved so pleasing and affable, they in turn, the girls particularly, were satisfied that he was eligible enough.

And in consequence, two weeks later, Clyde, searching for inexpensive Christmas presents in Stark's for his mother, father, sisters, brother and Roberta, and encountering Jill Trumbull doing a little belated shopping herself, was invited by her to attend a pre-Christmas dance that was to be given the next night by Vanda Steele at her home in Gloversville. Jill herself was going with Frank Harriet and she was not sure but that Sondra Finchley would be there. Another engagement of some

kind appeared to be in the way, but still she was intending to come if she could. But her sister Gertrude would be glad to have him escort her—a very polite way of arranging for Gertrude. Besides, as she knew, if Sondra heard that Clyde was to be there, this might induce her to desert her other engagement.

"Tracy will be glad to stop for you in time," she went on, "or—" she hesitated—"perhaps you'd like to come over for dinner with us before we go. It'll be just the family, but we'd be delighted to have you. The dancing doesn't begin till eleven."

The dance was for Friday night, and on that night Clyde had arranged to be with Roberta because on the following day she was leaving for a three-day-over-Christmas holiday visit to her parents—the longest stretch of time thus far she had spent away from him. And because, apart from his knowledge she had arranged to present him with a new fountain pen and eversharp pencil, she had been most anxious that he should spend this last evening with her, a fact which she had impressed upon him. And he, on his part, had intended to make use of this last evening to surprise her with a white-and-black toilet set.

But now, so thrilled was he at the possibility of a reëncounter with Sondra, he decided that he would cancel this last evening engagement with Roberta, although not without some misgivings as to the difficulty as well as the decency of it. For despite the fact that he was now so lured by Sondra, nevertheless he was still deeply interested in Roberta and he did not like to grieve her in this way. She would look so disappointed, as he knew. Yet at the same time so flattered and enthused was he by this sudden, if tardy, social development that he could not now think of refusing Jill. What? Neglect to visit the Steeles in Gloversville and in company with the Trumbulls and without any help from the Griffiths, either? It might be disloyal, cruel, treacherous to Roberta, but was he not likely to meet Sondra?

In consequence he announced that he would go, but immediately afterwards decided that he must go round and explain to Roberta, make some suitable excuse—that the Griffiths, for instance, had invited him for dinner. That would be sufficiently overawing and compelling to her. But upon arriving, and finding her out, he decided to explain the following morning at the factory—by note, if necessary. To make up for it he decided he might promise to accompany her as far as Fonda on Saturday and give her her present then.

But on Friday morning at the factory, instead of explaining to her with the seriousness and even emotional dissatisfaction which would have governed him before, he now whispered: "I

have to break that engagement to-night, honey. Been invited to my uncle's, and I have to go. And I'm not sure that I can get around afterwards. I'll try if I get through in time. But I'll see you on the Fonda car to-morrow if I don't. I've got something I want to give you, so don't feel too bad. Just got word this morning or I'd have let you know. You're not going to feel bad, are you?" He looked at her as gloomily as possible in order to express his own sorrow over this.

But Roberta, her presents and her happy last evening with him put aside in this casual way, and for the first time, too, in this fashion, shook her head negatively, as if to say "Oh, no," but her spirits were heavily depressed and she fell to wondering what this sudden desertion of her at this time might portend. For, up to this time, Clyde had been attentiveness itself, concealing his recent contact with Sondra behind a veil of pretended, unmodified affection which had, as yet, been sufficient to deceive her. It might be true, as he said, that an unescapable invitation had come up which necessitated all this. But, oh, the happy evening she had planned! And now they would not be together again for three whole days. She grieved dubiously at the factory and in her room afterwards, thinking that Clyde might at least have suggested coming around to her room late, after his uncle's dinner in order that she might give him the presents. But his eventual excuse made this day was that the dinner was likely to last too late. He could not be sure. They had talked of going somewhere else afterwards.

But meanwhile Clyde, having gone to the Trumbulls', and later to the Steeles', was flattered and reassured by a series of developments such as a month before he would not have dreamed of anticipating. For at the Steeles' he was promptly introduced to a score of personalities there who, finding him chaperoned by the Trumbulls and learning that he was a Griffiths, as promptly invited him to affairs of their own—or hinted at events that were to come to which he might be invited, so that at the close he found himself with cordial invitations to attend a New Year's dance at the Vandams' in Gloversville, as well as a dinner and dance that was to be given Christmas Eve by the Harriets in Lycurgus, an affair to which Gilbert and his sister Bella, as well as Sondra, Bertine and others were invited.

And lastly, there was Sondra herself appearing on the scene at about midnight in company with Scott Nicholson, Freddie Sells and Bertine, at first pretending to be wholly unaware of his presence, yet deigning at last to greet him with an, "Oh, hello, I didn't expect to find you here." She was draped most

alluringly in a deep red Spanish shawl. But Clyde could sense from the first that she was quite aware of his presence, and at the first available opportunity he drew near to her and asked yearningly, "Aren't you going to dance with me at all?"

"Why, of course, if you want me to. I thought maybe you had forgotten me by now," she said mockingly.

"As though I'd be likely to forget you. The only reason I'm here to-night is because I thought I might see you again. I haven't thought of any one or anything else since I saw you last."

Indeed so infatuated was he with her ways and airs, that instead of being irritated by her pretended indifference, he was all the more attracted. And he now achieved an intensity which to her was quite compelling. His eyelids narrowed and his eyes lit with a blazing desire which was quite disturbing to see.

"My, but you can say the nicest things in the nicest way when you want to." She was toying with a large Spanish comb in her hair for the moment and smiling. "And you say them just as though you meant them."

"Do you mean to say that you don't believe me, Sondra," he inquired almost feverishly, this second use of her name thrilling her now as much as it did him. Although inclined to frown on so marked a presumption in his case, she let it pass because it was pleasing to her.

"Oh, yes, I do. Of course," she said a little dubiously, and for the first time nervously, where he was concerned. She was beginning to find it a little hard to decipher her proper line of conduct in connection with him, whether to repress him more or less. "But you must say now what dance you want. I see some one coming for me." And she held her small program up to him archly and intriguingly. "You may have the eleventh. That's the next after this."

"Is that all?"

"Well, and the fourteenth, then, greedy," she laughed into Clyde's eyes, a laughing look which quite enslaved him.

Subsequently learning from Frank Harriet in the course of a dance that Clyde had been invited to his house for Christmas Eve, as well as that Jessica Phant had invited him to Utica for New Year's Eve, she at once conceived of him as slated for real success and decided that he was likely to prove less of a social burden than she had feared. He was charming—there was no doubt of it. And he was so devoted to her. In consequence, as she now decided, it might be entirely possible that some of these other girls, seeing him recognized by some of the best people here and elsewhere, would become sufficiently in-

terested, or drawn to him even, to wish to overcome his devotion to her. Being of a vain and presumptuous disposition herself, she decided that that should not be. Hence, in the course of her second dance with Clyde, she said: "You've been invited to the Harriets' for Christmas Eve, haven't you?"

"Yes, and I owe it all to you, too," he exclaimed warmly. "Are you going to be there?"

"Oh, I'm awfully sorry. I am invited and I wish now that I was going. But you know I arranged some time ago to go over to Albany and then up to Saratoga for the holidays. I'm going to-morrow, but I'll be back before New Year's. Some friends of Freddie's are giving a big affair over in Schenectady New Year's Eve, though. And your cousin Bella and my brother Stuart and Grant and Bertine are going. If you'd like to, you might go along with us over there."

She had been about to say "me," but had changed it to "us." She was thinking that this would certainly demonstrate her control over him to all those others, seeing that it nullified Miss Phant's invitation. And at once Clyde accepted, and with delight, since it would bring him in contact with her again.

At the same time he was astonished and almost aghast over the fact that in this casual and yet very intimate and definite way she was planning for him to reëncounter Bella, who would at once carry the news of his going with her and these others to her family. And what would not that spell, seeing that even as yet the Griffiths had not invited him anywhere—not even for Christmas? For although the fact of Clyde having been picked up by Sondra in her car as well as later, that he had been invited to the Now and Then, had come to their ears, still nothing had been done. Gilbert Griffiths was wroth, his father and mother puzzled as to their proper course but remaining inactive nonetheless.

But the group, according to Sondra, might remain in Schenectady until the following morning, a fact which she did not trouble to explain to Clyde at first. And by now he had forgotten that Roberta, having returned from her long stay at Biltz by then, and having been deserted by him over Christmas, would most assuredly be expecting him to spend New Year's Eve with her. That was a complication which was to dawn later. Now he only saw bliss in Sondra's thought of him and at once eagerly and enthusiastically agreed.

"But you know," she said cautiously, "you mustn't pay so very much attention to me over there or here or anywhere or think anything of it, if I don't to you. I may not be able to see

so very much of you if you do. I'll tell you about that sometime. You see my father and mother are funny people. And so are some of my friends here. But if you'll just be nice and sort of indifferent—you know—I may be able to see quite a little of you this winter yet. Do you see?"

Thrilled beyond words by this confession, which came because of his too ardent approaches as he well knew, he looked at her eagerly and searchingly.

"But you care for me a little, then, don't you?" he half-demanded, half-pleaded, his eyes lit with that alluring light which so fascinated her. And cautious and yet attracted, swayed sensually and emotionally and yet dubious as to the wisdom of her course, Sondra replied: "Well, I'll tell you. I do and I don't. That is, I can't tell yet. I like you a lot. Sometimes I think I like you more than others. You see we don't know each other very well yet. But you'll come with me to Schenectady, though, won't you?"

"Oh, will I?"

"I'll write you more about that, or call you up. You have a telephone, haven't you?"

He gave her the number.

"And if by any chance there's any change or I have to break the engagement, don't think anything of it. I'll see you later—somewhere, sure." She smiled and Clyde felt as though he were choking. The mere thought of her being so frank with him, and saying that she cared for him a lot, at times, was sufficient to cause him to almost reel with joy. To think that this beautiful girl was so anxious to include him in her life if she could—this wonderful girl who was surrounded by so many friends and admirers from which she could take her pick.

CHAPTER XXVIII

SIX-THIRTY the following morning. And Clyde, after but a single hour's rest after his return from Gloversville, rising, his mind full of mixed and troubled thoughts as to how to readjust his affairs in connection with Roberta. She was going to Biltz to-day. He had promised to go as far as Fonda. But now he did not want to go. Of course he would have to concoct some excuse. But what?

Fortunately the day before he had heard Whiggam tell Liggett there was to be a meeting of department heads after closing hours in Smillie's office to-day, and that he was to be there. Nothing was said to Clyde, since his department was included in Liggett's, but now he decided that he could offer this as a reason and accordingly, about an hour before noon, he dropped a note on her desk which read:

"HONEY: Awfully sorry, but just told that I have to be at a meeting of department heads downstairs at three. That means I can't go to Fonda with you, but will drop around to the room for a few minutes right after closing. Have something I want to give you, so be sure and wait. But don't feel too bad. It can't be helped. See you sure when you come back Wednesday.

"CLYDE."

At first, since she could not read it at once, Roberta was pleased because she imagined it contained some further favorable word about the afternoon. But on opening it in the ladies' rest room a few minutes afterwards, her face fell. Coupled as this was with the disappointment of the preceding evening, when Clyde had failed to appear, together with his manner of the morning which to her had seemed self-absorbed, if not exactly distant, she began to wonder what it was that was bringing about this sudden change. Perhaps he could not avoid attending a meeting any more than he could avoid going to his uncle's when he was asked. But the day before, following his word to her that he could not be with her that evening, his manner was gayer, less sober, than his supposed affection in the face of her departure would warrant. After all he had known before that she was to be gone for three days. He also knew that noth-

ing weighed on her more than being absent from him any length of time.

At once her mood from one of hopefulness changed to one of deep depression—the blues. Life was always doing things like this to her. Here it was—two days before Christmas, and now she would have to go to Biltz, where there was nothing much but such cheer as she could bring, and all by herself, and after scarcely a moment with him. She returned to her bench, her face showing all the unhappiness that had suddenly overtaken her. Her manner was listless and her movements indifferent—a change which Clyde noticed; but still, because of his sudden and desperate feeling for Sondra, he could not now bring himself to repent.

At one, the giant whistles of some of the neighboring factories sounding the Saturday closing hours, both he and Roberta betook themselves separately to her room. And he was thinking to himself as he went what to say now. What to do? How in the face of this suddenly frosted and blanched affection to pretend an interest he did not feel—how, indeed, continue with a relationship which now, as alive and vigorous as it might have been as little as fifteen days before, appeared exceedingly anemic and colorless. It would not do to say or indicate in any way that he did not care for her any more—for that would be so decidedly cruel and might cause Roberta to say what? Do what? And on the other hand, neither would it do, in the face of his longings and prospects in the direction of Sondra to continue in a type of approach and declaration that was not true or sound and that could only tend to maintain things as they were. Impossible! Besides, at the first hint of reciprocal love on the part of Sondra, would he not be anxious and determined to desert Roberta if he could? And why not? As contrasted with one of Sondra's position and beauty, what had Roberta really to offer him? And would it be fair in one of her station and considering the connections and the possibilities that Sondra offered, for her to demand or assume that he should continue a deep and undivided interest in her as opposed to this other? That would not really be fair, would it?

It was thus that he continued to speculate while Roberta, preceding him to her room, was asking herself what was this now that had so suddenly come upon her—over Clyde—this sudden indifference, this willingness to break a pre-Christmas date, and when she was about to leave for home and not to see him for three days and over Christmas, too, to make him not wish to ride with her even so far as Fonda. He might say

that it was that meeting, but was it? She could have waited until four if necessary, but something in his manner had precluded that—something distant and evasive. Oh, what did this all mean? And, so soon after the establishing of this intimacy, which at first and up to now at least had seemed to be drawing them indivisibly together. Did it spell a change—danger to or the end even of their wonderful love dream? Oh, dear! And she had given him so much and now his loyalty meant everything —her future—her life.

She stood in her room pondering this new problem as Clyde arrived, his Christmas package under his arm, but still fixed in his determination to modify his present relationship with Roberta, if he could—yet, at the same time anxious to put as inconsequential a face on the proceeding as possible.

"Gee, I'm awfully sorry about this, Bert," he began briskly, his manner a mixture of attempted gayety, sympathy and uncertainty. "I hadn't an idea until about a couple of hours ago that they were going to have this meeting. But you know how it is. You just can't get out of a thing like this. You're not going to feel too bad, are you?" For already, from her expression at the factory as well as here, he had gathered that her mood was of the darkest. "I'm glad I got the chance to bring this around to you, though," he added, handing the gift to her. "I meant to bring it around last night only that other business came up. Gee, I'm sorry about the whole thing. Really, I am."

Delighted as she might have been the night before if this gift had been given to her, Roberta now put the box on the table, all the zest that might have been joined with it completely banished.

"Did you have a good time last night, dear?" she queried, curious as to the outcome of the event that had robbed her of him.

"Oh, pretty good," returned Clyde, anxious to put as deceptive a face as possible on the night that had meant so much to him and spelled so much danger to her. "I thought I was just going over to my uncle's for dinner like I told you. But after I got there I found that what they really wanted me for was to escort Bella and Myra over to some doings in Gloversville. There's a rich family over there, the Steeles—big glove people, you know. Well, anyhow, they were giving a dance and they wanted me to take them over because Gil couldn't go. But it wasn't so very interesting. I was glad when it was all over." He used the names Bella, Myra and Gilbert as

though they were long and assured intimates of his—an intimacy which invariably impressed Roberta greatly.

"You didn't get through in time then to come around here, did you?"

"No, I didn't, 'cause I had to wait for the bunch to come back. I just couldn't get away. But aren't you going to open your present?" he added, anxious to divert her thoughts from this desertion which he knew was preying on her mind.

She began to untie the ribbon that bound his gift, at the same time that her mind was riveted by the possibilities of the party which he had felt called upon to mention. What girls beside Bella and Myra had been there? Was there by any chance any girl outside of herself in whom he might have become recently interested? He was always talking about Sondra Finchley, Bertine Cranston and Jill Trumbull. Were they, by any chance, at this party?

"Who all were over there beside your cousins?" she suddenly asked.

"Oh, a lot of people that you don't know. Twenty or thirty from different places around here."

"Any others from Lycurgus beside your cousins?" she persisted.

"Oh, a few. We picked up Jill Trumbull and her sister, because Bella wanted to. Arabella Stark and Perley Haynes were already over there when we got there." He made no mention of Sondra or any of the others who so interested him.

But because of the manner in saying it—something in the tone of his voice and flick of his eyes, the answer did not satisfy Roberta. She was really intensely troubled by this new development, but did not feel that under the circumstances it was wise to importune Clyde too much. He might resent it. After all he had always been identified with this world since ever she had known him. And she did not want him to feel that she was attempting to assert any claims over him, though such was her true desire.

"I wanted so much to be with you last night to give you your present," she returned instead, as much to divert her own thoughts as to appeal to his regard for her. Clyde sensed the sorrow in her voice and as of old it appealed to him, only now he could not and would not let it take hold of him as much as otherwise it might have.

"But you know how that was, Bert," he replied, with almost an air of bravado. "I just told you."

"I know," she replied sadly and attempting to conceal the

true mood that was dominating her. At the same time she was removing the paper and opening the lid to the case that contained her toilet set. And once opened, her mood changed slightly because never before had she possessed anything so valuable or original. "Oh, this is beautiful, isn't it?" she exclaimed, interested for the moment in spite of herself. "I didn't expect anything like this. My two little presents won't seem like very much now."

She crossed over at once to get her gifts. Yet Clyde could see that although his gift was exceptional, still it was not sufficient to overcome the depression which his indifference had brought upon her. His continued love was far more vital than any present.

"You like it, do you?" he asked, eagerly hoping against hope that it would serve to divert her.

"Of course, dear," she replied, looking at it interestedly. "But mine won't seem so much," she added gloomily, and not a little depressed by the general outcome of all her plans. "But they'll be useful to you and you'll always have them near you, next your heart, where I want them to be."

She handed over the small box which contained the metal ever-sharp pencil and the silver ornamented fountain pen she had chosen for him because she fancied they would be useful to him in his work at the factory. Two weeks before he would have taken her in his arms and sought to console her for the misery he was now causing her. But now he merely stood there wondering how, without seeming too distant, he could assuage her and yet not enter upon the customary demonstrations. And in order so to do he burst into enthusiastic and yet somehow hollow words in regard to her present to him.

"Oh, gee, these are swell, honey, and just what I need. You certainly couldn't have given me anything that would come in handier. I can use them all the time." He appeared to examine them with the utmost pleasure and afterwards fastened them in his pocket ready for use. Also, because for the moment she was before him so downcast and wistful, epitomizing really all the lure of the old relationship, he put his arms around her and kissed her. She was winsome, no doubt of it. And then when she threw her arms around his neck and burst into tears, he held her close, saying that there was no cause for all this and that she would be back Wednesday and all would be as before. At the same time he was thinking that this was not true, and how strange that was—seeing that only so recently he had cared for her so much. It was amazing how another girl could divert him

in this way. And yet so it was. And although she might be thinking that he was still caring for her as he did before, he was not and never would again. And because of this he felt really sorry for her.

Something of this latest mood in him reached Roberta now, even as she listened to his words and felt his caresses. They failed to convey sincerity. His manner was too restless, his embraces too apathetic, his tone without real tenderness. Further proof as to this was added when, after a moment or two, he sought to disengage himself and looked at his watch, saying, "I guess I'll have to be going now, honey. It's twenty of three now and that meeting is for three. I wish I could ride over with you, but I'll see you when you get back."

He bent down to kiss her but with Roberta sensing once and for all, this time, that his mood in regard to her was different, colder. He was interested and kind, but his thoughts were elsewhere—and at this particular season of the year, too—of all times. She tried to gather her strength and her self-respect together and did, in part—saying rather coolly, and determinedly toward the last: "Well, I don't want you to be late, Clyde. You better hurry. But I don't want to stay over there either later than Christmas night. Do you suppose if I come back early Christmas afternoon, you will come over here at all? I don't want to be late Wednesday for work."

"Why, sure, of course, honey, I'll be around," replied Clyde genially and even whole-heartedly, seeing that he had nothing else scheduled, that he knew of, for then, and would not so soon and boldly seek to evade her in this fashion. "What time do you expect to get in?"

The hour was to be eight and he decided that for that occasion, anyhow, a reunion would be acceptable. He drew out his watch again and saying, "I'll have to be going now, though," moved toward the door.

Nervous as to the significance of all this and concerned about the future, she now went over to him and seizing his coat lapels and looking into his eyes, half-pleaded and half-demanded: "Now, this is sure for Christmas night, is it, Clyde? You won't make any other engagement this time, will you?"

"Oh, don't worry. You know me. You know I couldn't help that other, honey. But I'll be on hand Tuesday, sure," he returned. And kissing her, he hurried out, feeling, perhaps, that he was not acting as wisely as he should, but not seeing clearly how otherwise he was to do. A man couldn't break off with a girl as he was trying to do, or at least might want to,

without exercising some little tact or diplomacy, could he? There was no sense in that nor any real skill, was there? There must be some other and better way than that, surely. At the same time his thoughts were already running forward to Sondra and New Year's Eve. He was going with her to Schenectady to a party and then he would have a chance to judge whether she was caring for him as much as she had seemed to the night before.

After he had gone, Roberta turned in a rather lorn and weary way and looked out the window after him, wondering as to what her future with him was to be, if at all? Supposing now, for any reason, he should cease caring for her. She had given him so much. And her future was now dependent upon him, his continued regard. Was he going to get tired of her now—not want to see her any more? Oh, how terrible that would be. What would she—what could she do then? If only she had not given herself to him, yielded so easily and so soon upon his demand.

She gazed out of her window at the bare snow-powdered branches of the trees outside and sighed. The holidays! And going away like this. Oh! Besides he was so high placed in this local society. And there were so many things brighter and better than she could offer calling him.

She shook her head dubiously, surveyed her face in the mirror, put together the few presents and belongings which she was taking with her to her home, and departed.

CHAPTER XXIX

BILTZ and the fungoid farm land after Clyde and Lycurgus was depressing enough to Roberta, for all there was too closely identified with deprivations and repressions which discolor the normal emotions centering about old scenes.

As she stepped down from the train at the drab and aged chalet which did service for a station, she observed her father in the same old winter overcoat he had worn for a dozen years, waiting for her with the old family conveyance, a decrepit but still whole buggy and a horse as bony and weary as himself. He had, as she had always thought, the look of a tired and defeated man. His face brightened when he saw Roberta, for she had always been his favorite child, and he chatted quite cheerfully as she climbed in alongside of him and they turned around and started toward the road that led to the farmhouse, a rough and winding affair of dirt at a time when excellent automobile roads were a commonplace elsewhere.

As they rode along Roberta found herself checking off mentally every tree, curve, landmark with which she had been familiar. But with no happy thoughts. It was all too drab. The farm itself, coupled with the chronic illness and inefficiency of Titus and the inability of the youngest boy Tom or her mother to help much, was as big a burden as ever. A mortgage of $2000 that had been placed on it years before had never been paid off, the north chimney was still impaired, the steps were sagging even more than ever and the walls and fences and outlying buildings were no different—save to be made picturesque now by the snows of winter covering them. Even the furniture remained the same jumble that it had always been. And there were her mother and younger sister and brother, who knew nothing of her true relationship to Clyde—a mere name his here—and assuming that she was wholeheartedly delighted to be back with them once more. Yet because of what she knew of her own life and Clyde's uncertain attitude toward her, she was now, if anything, more depressed than before.

Indeed, the fact that despite her seeming recent success she had really compromised herself in such a way that unless through marriage with Clyde she was able to readjust her-

self to the moral level which her parents understood and approved, she, instead of being the emissary of a slowly and modestly improving social condition for all, might be looked upon as one who had reduced it to a lower level still—its destroyer—was sufficient to depress and reduce her even more. A very depressing and searing thought.

Worse and more painful still was the thought in connection with all this that, by reason of the illusions which from the first had dominated her in connection with Clyde, she had not been able to make a confidant of her mother or any one else in regard to him. For she was dubious as to whether her mother would not consider that her aspirations were a bit high. And she might ask questions in regard to him and herself which might prove embarrassing. At the same time, unless she had some confidant in whom she could truly trust, all her troublesome doubts in regard to herself and Clyde must remain a secret.

After talking for a few moments with Tom and Emily, she went into the kitchen where her mother was busy with various Christmas preparations. Her thought was to pave the way with some observations of her own in regard to the farm here and her life at Lycurgus, but as she entered, her mother looked up to say: "How does it feel, Bob, to come back to the country? I suppose it all looks rather poor compared to Lycurgus," she added a little wistfully.

Roberta could tell from the tone of her mother's voice and the rather admiring look she cast upon her that she was thinking of her as one who had vastly improved her state. At once she went over to her and, putting her arms about her affectionately, exclaimed: "Oh, mamma, wherever you are is just the nicest place. Don't you know that?"

For answer her mother merely looked at her with affectionate and well-wishing eyes and patted her on the back. "Well, Bobbie," she added, quietly, "you know how you are about me."

Something in her mother's voice which epitomized the long years of affectionate understanding between them—an understanding based, not only on a mutual desire for each other's happiness, but a complete frankness in regard to all emotions and moods which had hitherto dominated both—touched her almost to the point of tears. Her throat tightened and her eyes moistened, although she sought to overcome any show of emotion whatsoever. She longed to tell her everything. At the same time the compelling passion she retained for Clyde, as well as the fact that she had compromised herself as she had, now showed her that she had erected a barrier which could not

easily be torn down. The conventions of this local world were much too strong—even where her mother was concerned.

She hesitated a moment, wishing that she could quickly and clearly present to her mother the problem that was weighing upon her and receive her sympathy, if not help. But instead she merely said: "Oh, I wish you could have been with me all the time in Lycurgus, mamma. Maybe—" She paused, realizing that she had been on the verge of speaking without due caution. Her thought was that with her mother near at hand she might have been able to have resisted Clyde's insistent desires.

"Yes, I suppose you do miss me," her mother went on, "but it's better for you, don't you think? You know how it is over here, and you like your work. You do like your work, don't you?"

"Oh, the work is nice enough. I like that part of it. It's been so nice to be able to help here a little, but it's not so nice living all alone."

"Why did you leave the Newtons, Bob? Was Grace so disagreeable? I should have thought she would have been company for you."

"Oh, she was at first," replied Roberta. "Only she didn't have any men friends of her own, and she was awfully jealous of anybody that paid the least attention to me. I couldn't go anywhere but she had to go along, or if it wasn't that then she always wanted me to be with her, so I couldn't go anywhere by myself. You know how it is, mamma. Two girls can't go with one young man."

"Yes, I know how it is, Bob." Her mother laughed a little, then added: "Who is he?"

"It's Mr. Griffiths, mother," she added, after a moment's hesitation, a sense of the exceptional nature of her contact as contrasted with this very plain world here passing like a light across her eyes. For all her fears, even the bare possibility of joining her life with Clyde's was marvelous. "But I don't want you to mention his name to anybody yet," she added. "He doesn't want me to. His relatives are so very rich, you know. They own the company—that is, his uncle does. But there's a rule there about any one who works for the company—any one in charge of a department. I mean not having anything to do with any of the girls. And he wouldn't with any of the others. But he likes me—and I like him, and it's different with us. Besides I'm going to resign pretty soon and get a place somewhere else, I think, and then it won't make any difference. I can tell anybody, and so can he."

Roberta was thinking now that, in the face of her recent treatment at the hands of Clyde, as well as because of the way in which she had given herself to him without due precaution as to her ultimate rehabilitation via marriage, that perhaps this was not exactly true. He might not—a vague, almost formless, fear this, as yet—want her to tell anybody now—ever. And unless he were going to continue to love her and marry her, she might not want any one to know of it, either. The wretched, shameful, difficult position in which she had placed herself by all this.

On the other hand, Mrs. Alden, learning thus casually of the odd and seemingly clandestine nature of this relationship, was not only troubled but puzzled, so concerned was she for Roberta's happiness. For, although, as she now said to herself, Roberta was such a good, pure and careful girl—the best and most unselfish and wisest of all her children—still might it not be possible—? But, no, no one was likely to either easily or safely compromise or betray Roberta. She was too conservative and good, and so now she added: "A relative of the owner, you say—the Mr. Samuel Griffiths you wrote about?"

"Yes, Mamma. He's his nephew."

"The young man at the factory?" her mother asked, at the same time wondering just how Roberta had come to attract a man of Clyde's position, for, from the very first she had made it plain that he was a member of the family who owned the factory. This in itself was a troublesome fact. The traditional result of such relationships, common the world over, naturally caused her to be intensely fearful of just such an association as Roberta seemed to be making. Nevertheless she was not at all convinced that a girl of Roberta's looks and practicality would not be able to negotiate an association of the sort without harm to herself.

"Yes," Roberta replied simply.

"What's he like, Bob?"

"Oh, awfully nice. So good-looking, and he's been so nice to me. I don't think the place would be as nice as it is except that he is so refined, he keeps those factory girls in their place. He's a nephew of the president of the company, you see, and the girls just naturally have to respect him."

"Well, that *is* nice, isn't it? I think it's so much better to work for refined people than just anybody. I know you didn't think so much of the work over at Trippetts Mills. Does he come to see you often, Bob?"

"Well, yes, pretty often," Roberta replied, flushing slightly,

for she realized that she could not be entirely frank with her mother.

Mrs. Alden, looking up at the moment, noticed this, and, mistaking it for embarrassment, asked teasingly: "You like him, don't you?"

"Yes, I do, mother," Roberta replied, simply and honestly.

"What about him? Does he like you?"

Roberta crossed to the kitchen window. Below it at the base of the slope which led to the springhouse, and the one most productive field of the farm, were ranged all the dilapidated buildings which more than anything else about the place bespoke the meager material condition to which the family had fallen. In fact, during the last ten years these things had become symbols of inefficiency and lack. Somehow at this moment, bleak and covered with snow, they identified themselves in her mind as the antithesis of all to which her imagination aspired. And, not strangely either, the last was identified with Clyde. Somberness as opposed to happiness—success in love or failure in love. Assuming that he truly loved her now and would take her away from all this, then possibly the bleakness of it all for her and her mother would be broken. But assuming that he did not, then all the results of her yearning, but possibly mistaken, dreams would be not only upon her own head, but upon those of these others, her mother's first. She troubled what to say, but finally observed: "Well, he says he does."

"Do you think he intends to marry you?" Mrs. Alden asked, timidly and hopefully, because of all her children her heart and hopes rested most with Roberta.

"Well, I'll tell you, Mamma . . ." The sentence was not finished, for just then Emily, hurrying in from the front door, called: "Oh, Gif's here. He came in an automobile. Somebody drove him over, I guess, and he's got four or five big bundles."

And immediately after came Tom with the elder brother, who, in a new overcoat, the first result of his career with the General Electric Company in Schenectady, greeted his mother affectionately, and after her, Roberta.

"Why, Gifford," his mother exclaimed. "We didn't expect you until the nine o'clock. How did you get here so soon?"

"Well, I didn't think I would be. I ran into Mr. Rearick down in Schenectady and he wanted to know if I didn't want to drive back with him. I see old Pop Myers over at Trippetts Mills has got the second story to his house at last, Bob," he turned and added to Roberta: "I suppose it'll be another year before he gets the roof on."

"I suppose so," replied Roberta, who knew the old Trippetts Mills character well. In the meantime she had relieved him of his coat and packages which, piled on the dining-room table, were being curiously eyed by Emily.

"Hands off, Em!" called Gifford to his little sister. "Nothing doing with those until Christmas morning. Has anybody cut a Christmas tree yet? That was my job last year."

"It still is, Gifford," his mother replied. "I told Tom to wait until you came, 'cause you always get such a good one."

And just then through the kitchen door Titus entered, bearing an armload of wood, his gaunt face and angular elbows and knees contributing a sharp contrast to the comparative hopefulness of the younger generation. Roberta noticed it as he stood smiling upon his son, and, because she was so eager for something better than ever had been to come to all, now went over to her father and put her arms around him. "I know something Santy has brought my Dad that he'll like." It was a dark red plaid mackinaw that she was sure would keep him warm while executing his chores about the house, and she was anxious for Christmas morning to come so that he could see it.

She then went to get an apron in order to help her mother with the evening meal. No additional moment for complete privacy occurring, the opportunity to say more concerning that which both were so interested in—the subject of Clyde—did not come up again for several hours, after which length of time she found occasion to say: "Yes, but you mustn't ever say anything to anybody yet. I told him I wouldn't tell, and you mustn't."

"No, I won't, dear. But I was just wondering. But I suppose you know what you're doing. You're old enough now to take care of yourself, Bob, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am, Ma. And you mustn't worry about me, dear," she added, seeing a shadow, not of distrust but worry, passing over her beloved mother's face. How careful she must be not to cause her to worry when she had so much else to think about here on the farm.

Sunday morning brought the Gabels with full news of their social and material progress in Homer. Although her sister was not as attractive as she, and Fred Gabel was not such a man as at any stage in her life Roberta could have imagined herself interested in, still, after her troublesome thoughts in regard to Clyde, the sight of Agnes emotionally and materially content and at ease in the small security which matrimony and her none-

too-efficient husband provided, was sufficient to rouse in her that flapping, doubtful mood that had been assailing her since the previous morning. Was it not better, she thought, to be married to a man even as inefficient and unattractive but steadfast as Fred Gabel, than to occupy the anomalous position in which she now found herself in her relations with Clyde? For here was Gabel now talking briskly of the improvements that had come to himself and Agnes during the year in which they had been married. In that time he had been able to resign his position as teacher in Homer and take over on shares the management of a small book and stationery store whose principal contributory features were a toy department and soda fountain. They had been doing a good business. Agnes, if all went well, would be able to buy a mission parlor suite by next summer. Fred had already bought her a phonograph for Christmas. In proof of their well-being, they had brought satisfactory remembrances for all of the Aldens.

But Gabel had with him a copy of the Lycurgus *Star,* and at breakfast, which because of the visitors this morning was unusually late, was reading the news of that city, for in Lycurgus was located the wholesale house from which he secured a portion of his stock.

"Well, I see things are going full blast in your town, Bob," he observed. "*The Star* here says the Griffiths Company have got an order for 120,000 collars from the Buffalo trade alone. They must be just coining money over there."

"There's always plenty to do in my department, I know that," replied Roberta, briskly. "We never seem to have any the less to do whether business is good or bad. I guess it must be good all the time."

"Pretty soft for those people. They don't have to worry about anything. Some one was telling me they're going to build a new factory in Ilion to manufacture shirts alone. Heard anything about that down there?"

"Why, no, I haven't. Maybe it's some other company."

"By the way, what's the name of that young man you said was the head of your department? Wasn't he a Griffiths, too?" he asked briskly, turning to the editorial page, which also carried news of local Lycurgus society.

"Yes, his name is Griffiths—Clyde Griffiths. Why?"

"I think I saw his name in here a minute ago. I just wanted to see if it ain't the same fellow. Sure, here you are. Ain't this the one?" He passed the paper to Roberta with his finger on an item which read:

"Miss Vanda Steele, of Gloversville, was hostess at an informal dance held at her home in that city Friday night, at which were present several prominent members of Lycurgus society, among them the Misses Sondra Finchley, Bertine Cranston, Jill and Gertrude Trumbull and Perley Haynes, and Messrs. Clyde Griffiths, Frank Harriet, Tracy Trumbull, Grant Cranston and Scott Nicholson. The party, as is usual whenever the younger group assembles, did not break up until late, the Lycurgus members motoring back just before dawn. It is already rumored that most of this group will gather at the Ellerslies', in Schenectady, New Year's Eve for another event of this same gay nature."

"He seems to be quite a fellow over there," Gabel remarked, even as Roberta was reading.

The first thing that occurred to Roberta on reading this item was that it appeared to have little, if anything, to do with the group which Clyde had said was present. In the first place there was no mention of Myra or Bella Griffiths. On the other hand, all those names with which, because of recent frequent references on the part of Clyde, she was becoming most familiar were recorded as present. Sondra Finchley, Bertine Cranston, the Trumbull girls, Perley Haynes. He had said it had not been very interesting, and here it was spoken of as gay and he himself was listed for another engagement of the same character New Year's Eve, when, as a matter of fact, she had been counting on being with him. He had not even mentioned this New Year's engagement. And perhaps he would now make some last minute excuse for that, as he had for the previous Friday evening. Oh, dear! What did all this mean, anyhow!

Immediately what little romantic glamour this Christmas homecoming had held for her was dissipated. She began to wonder whether Clyde really cared for her as he had pretended. The dark state to which her incurable passion for him had brought her now pained her terribly. For without him and marriage and a home and children, and a reasonable place in such a local world as she was accustomed to, what was there for a girl like her in the world? And apart from his own continuing affection for her—if it was really continuing, what assurance had she, in the face of such incidents as these, that he would not eventually desert her? And if this were true, here was her future, in so far as marriage with any one else was concerned, compromised or made impossible, maybe, and with no reliance to be placed on him.

She fell absolutely silent. And although Gabel inquired: "That's the fellow, isn't it?" she arose without answering and said: "Excuse me, please, a moment. I want to get something

out of my bag," and hurried once more to her former room upstairs. Once there she sat down on the bed, and, resting her chin in her hands, a habit when troublesome or necessary thoughts controlled her, gazed at the floor.

Where was Clyde now?

What one, if any, of those girls did he take to the Steele party? Was he very much interested in her? Until this very day, because of Clyde's unbroken devotion to her, she had not even troubled to think there could be any other girl to whom his attentions could mean anything.

But now—now!

She got up and walked to the window and looked out on that same orchard where as a girl so many times she had been thrilled by the beauty of life. The scene was miserably bleak and bare. The thin, icy arms of the trees—the gray, swaying twigs—a lone, rustling leaf somewhere. And snow. And wretched outbuildings in need of repair. And Clyde becoming indifferent to her. And the thought now came to her swiftly and urgently that she must not stay here any longer than she could help—not even this day, if possible. She must return to Lycurgus and be near Clyde, if no more than to persuade him to his old affection for her, or if not that, then by her presence to prevent him from devoting himself too wholly to these others. Decidedly, to go away like this, even for the holidays, was not good. In her absence he might desert her completely for another girl, and if so, then would it not be her fault? At once she pondered as to what excuse she could make in order to return this day. But realizing that in view of all these preliminary preparations this would seem inexplicably unreasonable, to her mother most of all, she decided to endure it as she had planned until Christmas afternoon, then to return, never to leave for so long a period again.

But ad interim, all her thoughts were on how and in what way she could make more sure, if at all, of Clyde's continued interest and social and emotional support, as well as marriage in the future. Supposing he had lied to her, how could she influence him, if at all, not to do so again? How to make him feel that lying between them was not right? How to make herself securely first in his heart against the dreams engendered by the possible charms of another?

How?

CHAPTER XXX

BUT Roberta's return to Lycurgus and her room at the Gilpins' Christmas night brought no sign of Clyde nor any word of explanation. For in connection with the Griffiths in the meantime there had been a development relating to all this which, could she or Clyde have known, would have interested both not a little. For subsequent to the Steele dance that same item read by Roberta fell under the eyes of Gilbert. He was seated at the breakfast table the Sunday morning after the party, and was about to sip from a cup of coffee when he encountered it. On the instant his teeth snapped about as a man might snap his watch lid, and instead of drinking he put his cup down and examined the item with more care. Other than his mother there was no one at the table or in the room with him, but knowing that she, more than any of the others, shared his views in regard to Clyde, he now passed the paper over to her.

"Look at who's breaking into society now, will you?" he admonished sharply and sarcastically, his eyes radiating the hard and contemptuous opposition he felt. "We'll be having him up here next!"

"Who?" inquired Mrs. Griffiths, as she took the paper and examined the item calmly and judicially, yet not without a little of outwardly suppressed surprise when she saw the name. For although the fact of Clyde's having been picked up by Sondra in her car sometime before and later been invited to dinner at the Trumbulls', had been conveyed to the family sometime before, still a society notice in *The Star* was different. "Now I wonder how it was that he came to be invited to that?" meditated Mrs. Griffiths who was always conscious of her son's mood in regard to all this.

"Now, who would do it but that little Finchley snip, the little smart aleck?" snapped Gilbert. "She's got the idea from somewhere—from Bella for all I know—that we don't care to have anything to do with him, and she thinks this is a clever way to hit back at me for some of the things I've done to her, or that she thinks I've done. At any rate, she thinks I don't like her, and that's right, I don't. And Bella knows it, too. And that goes for that little Cranston show-off, too. They're

both always running around with her. They're a set of show-offs and wasters, the whole bunch, and that goes for their brothers, too—Grant Cranston and Stew Finchley—and if something don't go wrong with one or another of that bunch one of these days, I miss my guess. You mark my word! They don't do a thing, the whole lot of them, from one year's end to the other but play around and dance and run here and there, as though there wasn't anything else in the world for them to do. And why you and Dad let Bella run with 'em as much as she does is more than I can see."

To this his mother protested. It was not possible for her to entirely estrange Bella from one portion of this local social group and direct her definitely toward the homes of certain others. They all mingled too freely. And she was getting along in years and had a mind of her own.

Just the same his mother's apology and especially in the face of the publication of this item by no means lessened Gilbert's opposition to Clyde's social ambitions and opportunities. What! That poor little moneyless cousin of his who had committed first the unpardonable offense of looking like him and, second, of coming here to Lycurgus and fixing himself on this very superior family. And after he had shown him all too plainly, and from the first, that he personally did not like him, did not want him, and if left to himself would never for so much as a moment endure him.

"He hasn't any money," he declared finally and very bitterly to his mother, "and he's hanging on here by the skin of his teeth as it is. And what for? If he is taken up by these people, what can he do? He certainly hasn't the money to do as they do, and he can't get it. And if he could, his job here wouldn't let him go anywhere much, unless some one troubled to pay his way. And how he is going to do his work and run with that crowd is more than I know. That bunch is on the go all the time."

Actually he was wondering whether Clyde would be included from now on, and if so, what was to be done about it. If he were to be taken up in this way, how was he, or the family, either, to escape from being civil to him? For obviously, as earlier and subsequent developments proved, his father did not choose to send him away.

Indeed, subsequent to this conversation, Mrs. Griffiths had laid the paper, together with a version of Gilbert's views before her husband at this same breakfast table. But he, true to his previous mood in regard to Clyde, was not inclined

to share his son's opinion. On the contrary, he seemed, as Mrs. Griffiths saw it, to look upon the development recorded by the item as a justification in part of his own original estimate of Clyde.

"I must say," he began, after listening to his wife to the end, "I can't see what's wrong with his going to a party now and then, or being invited here and there even if he hasn't any money. It looks more like a compliment to him and to us than anything else. I know how Gil feels about him. But it rather looks to me as though Clyde's just a little better than Gil thinks he is. At any rate, I can't and I wouldn't want to do anything about it. I've asked him to come down here, and the least I can do is to give him an opportunity to better himself. He seems to be doing his work all right. Besides, how would it look if I didn't?"

And later, because of some additional remarks on the part of Gilbert to his mother, he added: "I'd certainly rather have him going with some of the better people than some of the worse ones—that's one thing sure. He's neat and polite and from all I hear at the factory does his work well enough. As a matter of fact, I think it would have been better if we had invited him up to the lake last summer for a few days anyhow, as I suggested. As it is now, if we don't do something pretty soon, it will look as though we think he isn't good enough for us when the other people here seem to think he is. If you'll take my advice, you'll have him up here for Christmas or New Year's, anyhow, just to show that we don't think any less of him than our friends do."

This suggestion, once transferred to Gilbert by his mother, caused him to exclaim: "Well, I'll be hanged! All right, only don't think I'm going to lay myself out to be civil to him. It's a wonder, if father thinks he's so able, that he don't make a real position for him somewhere."

Just the same, nothing might have come of this had it not been that Bella, returning from Albany this same day, learned via contacts and telephone talks with Sondra and Bertine of the developments in connection with Clyde. Also that he had been invited to accompany them to the New Year's Eve dance at the Ellerslies' in Schenectady, Bella having been previously scheduled to make a part of this group before Clyde was thought of.

This sudden development, reported by Bella to her mother, was of sufficient import to cause Mrs. Griffiths as well as Samuel, if not Gilbert, later to decide to make the best of a situation which obviously was being forced upon them and themselves in-

vite Clyde for dinner—Christmas day—a sedate affair to which many others were bid. For this as they now decided would serve to make plain to all and at once that Clyde was not being as wholly ignored as some might imagine. It was the only reasonable thing to do at this late date. And Gilbert, on hearing this, and realizing that in this instance he was checkmated, exclaimed sourly: "Oh, all right. Invite him if you want to—if that's the way you and Dad feel about it. I don't see any real necessity for it even now. But you fix it to suit yourself. Constance and I are going over to Utica for the afternoon, anyhow, so I couldn't be there even if I wanted to."

He was thinking of what an outrageous thing it was that a girl whom he disliked as much as he did Sondra could thus via her determination and plottings thrust his own cousin on him and he be unable to prevent it. And what a beggar Clyde must be to attempt to attach himself in this way when he knew that he was not wanted! What sort of a youth was he, anyhow?

And so it was that on Monday morning Clyde had received another letter from the Griffiths, this time signed by Myra, asking him to have dinner with them at two o'clock Christmas day. But, since this at that time did not seem to interfere with his meeting Roberta Christmas night at eight, he merely gave himself over to extreme rejoicing in regard to it all now, and at last he was nearly as well placed here, socially, as any one. For although he had no money, see how he was being received—and by the Griffiths, too—among all the others. And Sondra taking so great an interest in him, actually talking and acting as though she might be ready to fall in love. And Gilbert checkmated by his social popularity. What would you say to that? It testified, as he saw it now, that at least his relatives had not forgotten him or that, because of his recent success in other directions, they were finding it necessary to be civil to him—a thought that was the same as the bays of victory to a contestant. He viewed it with as much pleasure almost as though there had never been any hiatus at all.

CHAPTER XXXI

UNFORTUNATELY, however, the Christmas dinner at the Griffiths', which included the Starks and their daughter Arabella, Mr. and Mrs. Wynant, who in the absence of their daughter Constance with Gilbert were dining with the Griffiths, the Arnolds, Anthonys, Harriets, Taylors and others of note in Lycurgus, so impressed and even overawed Clyde that although five o'clock came and then six, he was incapable of breaking away or thinking clearly and compellingly of his obligation to Roberta. Even when, slightly before six, the greater portion of those who had been thus cheerfully entertained began rising and making their bows and departing (and when he, too, should have been doing the same and thinking of his appointment with Roberta), being accosted by Violet Taylor, who was part of the younger group, and who now began talking of some additional festivities to be held that same evening at the Anthonys', and who added most urgently, "You're coming with us, aren't you? Sure you are," he at once acquiesced, although his earlier promise to Roberta forced the remembrance that she was probably already back and expecting him. But still he had time even now, didn't he?

Yet, once at the Anthonys', and talking and dancing with various girls, the obligation faded. But at nine he began worrying a little. For by this time she must be in her room and wondering what had become of him and his promise. And on Christmas night, too. And after she had been away three days.

Inwardly he grew more and more restless and troubled, the while outwardly he maintained that same high spirit that characterized him throughout the afternoon. Fortunately for his own mood, this same group, having danced and frolicked every night for the past week until almost nervously exhausted, it now unanimously and unconsciously yielded to weariness and at eleven thirty, broke up. And after having escorted Bella Griffiths to her door, Clyde hurried around to Elm Street to see if by any chance Roberta was still awake.

As he neared the Gilpins' he perceived through the snow-covered bushes and trees the glow of her single lamp. And for the time being, troubled as to what he should say—how

excuse himself for this inexplicable lapse—he paused near one of the large trees that bordered the street, debating with himself as to just what he would say. Would he insist that he had again been to the Griffiths', or where? For according to his previous story he had only been there the Friday before. In the months before when he had no social contacts, but was merely romanticizing in regard to them, the untruths he found himself telling her caused him no twinges of any kind. They were not real and took up no actual portion of his time, nor did they interfere with any of his desired contacts with her. But now in the face of the actuality and the fact that these new contacts meant everything to his future, as he saw it, he hesitated. His quick conclusion was to explain his absence this evening by a second invitation which had come later, also by asseverating that the Griffiths being potentially in charge of his material welfare, it was becoming more and more of a duty rather than an idle, evasive pleasure to desert her in this way at their command. Could he help it? And with this half-truth permanently fixed in his mind, he crossed the snow and gently tapped at her window.

At once the light was extinguished and a moment later the curtain lifted. Then Roberta, who had been mournfully brooding, opened the door and admitted him, having previously lit a candle as was her custom in order to avoid detection as much as possible, and at once he began in a whisper:

"Gee, but this society business here is getting to be the dizzy thing, honey. I never saw such a town as this. Once you go with these people one place to do one thing, they always have something else they want you to do. They're on the go all the time. When I went there Friday (he was referring to his lie about having gone to the Griffiths'), I thought that would be the last until after the holidays, but yesterday, and just when I was planning to go somewhere else, I got a note saying they expected me to come there again to-day for dinner sure."

"And to-day when I thought the dinner would begin at two," he continued to explain, "and end in time for me to be around here by eight like I said, it didn't start until three and only broke up a few minutes ago. Isn't that the limit? And I just couldn't get away for the last four hours. How've you been, honey? Did you have a good time? I hope so. Did they like the present I gave you?"

He rattled off these questions, to which she made brief and decidedly terse replies, all the time looking at him as much as to say, "Oh, Clyde, how can you treat me like this?"

But Clyde was so much interested in his own alibi, and how

to convince Roberta of the truth of it, that neither before nor after slipping off his coat, muffler and gloves and smoothing back his hair, did he look at her directly, or even tenderly, or indeed do anything to demonstrate to her that he was truly delighted to see her again. On the contrary, he was so fidgety and in part flustered that despite his past professions and actions she could feel that apart from being moderately glad to see her again he was more concerned about himself and his own partially explained defection than he was about her. And although after a few moments he took her in his arms and pressed his lips to hers, still, as on Saturday, she could feel that he was only partially united to her in spirit. Other things—the affairs that had kept him from her on Friday and to-night—were disturbing his thoughts and hers.

She looked at him, not exactly believing and yet not entirely wishing to disbelieve him. He might have been at the Griffiths', as he said, and they might have detained him. And yet he might not have, either. For she could not help recalling that on the previous Saturday he had said he had been there Friday and the paper on the other hand had stated that he was in Gloversville. But if she questioned him in regard to these things now, would he not get angry and lie to her still more? For after all she could not help thinking that apart from his love for her she had no real claim on him. But she could not possibly imagine that he could change so quickly.

"So that was why you didn't come to-night, was it?" she asked, with more spirit and irritation than she had ever used with him before. "I thought you told me sure you wouldn't let anything interfere," she went on, a little heavily.

"Well, so I did," he admitted. "And I wouldn't have either, except for the letter I got. You know I wouldn't let any one but my uncle interfere, but I couldn't turn them down when they asked me to come there on Christmas day. It's too important. It wouldn't look right, would it, especially when you weren't going to be here in the afternoon?"

The manner and tone in which he said this conveyed to Roberta more clearly than anything that he had ever said before how significant he considered this connection with his relatives to be and how unimportant anything she might value in regard to this relationship was to him. It came to her now that in spite of all his enthusiasm and demonstrativeness in the first stages of this affair, possibly she was much more trivial in his estimation than she had seemed to herself. And that meant that

her dreams and sacrifices thus far had been in vain. She became frightened.

"Well, anyhow," she went on dubiously in the face of this, "don't you think you might have left a note here, Clyde, so I would have got it when I got in?" She asked this mildly, not wishing to irritate him too much.

"But didn't I just tell you, honey, I didn't expect to be so late. I thought the thing would all be over by six, anyhow."

"Yes—well—anyhow—I know—but still—"

Her face wore a puzzled, troubled, nervous look, in which was mingled fear, sorrow, depression, distrust, a trace of resentment and a trace of despair, all of which, coloring and animating her eyes, which were now fixed on him in round orblike solemnity, caused him to suffer from a sense of having misused and demeaned her not a little. And because her eyes seemed to advertise this, he flushed a dark red flush that colored deeply his naturally very pale cheeks. But without appearing to notice this or lay any stress on it in any way at the time, Roberta added after a moment: "I notice that *The Star* mentioned that Gloversville party Sunday, but it didn't say anything about your cousins being over there. Were they?"

For the first time in all her questioning of him, she asked this as though she might possibly doubt him—a development which Clyde had scarcely anticipated in connection with her up to this time, and more than anything else, it troubled and irritated him.

"Of course they were," he replied falsely. "Why do you want to ask a thing like that when I told you they were?"

"Well, dear, I don't mean anything by it. I only wanted to know. But I did notice that it mentioned all those other people from Lycurgus that you are always talking about, Sondra Finchley, Bertine Cranston. You know you never mentioned anybody but the Trumbulls."

Her tone tended to make him bristle and grow cross, as she saw.

"Yes, I saw that, too, but it ain't so. If they were there, I didn't see them. The papers don't always get everything right." In spite of a certain crossness and irritation at being trapped in this fashion, his manner did not carry conviction, and he knew it. And he began to resent the fact that she should question him so. Why should she? Wasn't he of sufficient importance to move in this new world without her holding him back in this way?

Instead of denying or reproaching him further, she merely

looked at him, her expression one of injured wistfulness. She did not believe him now entirely and she did not utterly disbelieve him. A part of what he said was probably true. More important was it that he should care for her enough not to want to lie to her or to treat her badly. But how was that to be effected if he did not want to be kind or truthful? She moved back from him a few steps and with a gesture of helplessness said: "Oh, Clyde, you don't have to story to me. Don't you know that? I wouldn't care where you went if you would just tell me beforehand and not leave me like this all alone on Christmas night. It's just that that hurts so."

"But I'm not storying to you, Bert," he reiterated crossly. "I can't help how things look even if the paper did say so. The Griffiths were over there, and I can prove it. I got around here as soon as I could to-day. What do you want to get so mad about all at once? I've told you how things are. I can't do just as I want to here. They call me up at the last minute and want me to go. And I just can't get out of it. What's the use of being so mad about it?"

He stared defiantly while Roberta, checkmated in this general way, was at a loss as to how to proceed. The item about New Year's Eve was in her mind, but she felt that it might not be wise to say anything more now. More poignantly than ever now she was identifying him with that gay life of which he, but not she, was a part. And yet she hesitated even now to let him know how sharp were the twinges of jealousy that were beginning to assail her. They had such a good time in that fine world—he and those he knew—and she had so little. And besides, now he was always talking about that Sondra Finchley and that Bertine Cranston, or the papers were. Was it in either of those that he was most interested?

"Do you like that Miss Finchley very much?" she suddenly asked, looking up at him in the shadow, her desire to obtain some slight satisfaction—some little light on all this trouble—still torturing her.

At once Clyde sensed the importance of the question—a suggestion of partially suppressed interest and jealousy and helplessness, more in her voice even than in the way she looked. There was something so soft, coaxing and sad about her voice at times, especially when she was most depressed. At the same time he was slightly taken back by the shrewd or telepathic way in which she appeared to fix on Sondra. Immediately he felt that she should not know—that it would irritate her. At the same time, vanity in regard to his general position here, which

hourly was becoming more secure apparently, caused him to say: "Oh, I like her some, sure. She's very pretty, and a dandy dancer. And she has lots of money and dresses well." He was about to add that outside of that Sondra appealed to him in no other way, when Roberta, sensing something of the true interest he felt in this girl perhaps and the wide gulf that lay between herself and all his world, suddenly exclaimed: "Yes, and who wouldn't, with all the money she has? If I had as much money as that, I could too."

And to his astonishment and dismay even, at this point her voice grew suddenly vibrant and then broke, as on a sob. And as he could both see and feel, she was deeply hurt—terribly and painfully hurt—heartsore and jealous; and at once, although his first impulse was to grow angry and defiant again, his mood as suddenly softened. For it now pained him not a little to think that some one of whom he had once been so continuously fond up to this time should be made to suffer through jealousy of him, for he himself well knew the pangs of jealousy in connection with Hortense. He could for some reason almost see himself in Roberta's place. And for this reason, if no other, he now said, and quite softly: "Oh, now, Bert, as though I couldn't tell you about her or any one else without your getting mad about it! I didn't mean that I was especially interested in her. I was just telling you what I thought you wanted to know because you asked me if I liked her, that's all."

"Oh, yes, I know," replied Roberta, standing tensely and nervously before him, her face white, her hands suddenly clenched, and looking up at him dubiously and yet pleadingly. "But they've got everything. You know they have. And I haven't got anything, really. And it's so hard for me to keep up my end and against all of them, too, and with all they have." Her voice shook, and she ceased talking, her eyes filling and her lips beginning to quiver. And as swiftly she concealed her face with her hands and turned away, her shoulders shaking as she did so. Indeed her body was now torn for the moment by the most desperate and convulsive sobs, so much so that Clyde, perplexed and astonished and deeply moved by this sudden display of a pent-up and powerful emotion, as suddenly was himself moved deeply. For obviously this was no trick or histrionic bit intended to influence him, but rather a sudden and overwhelming vision of herself, as he himself could sense, as a rather lorn and isolated girl without friends or prospects as opposed to those others in whom he was now so interested and who had so much more—everything in fact. For behind her in her vision lay all the lorn

and detached years that had marred her youth, now so vivid because of her recent visit. She was really intensely moved—overwhelmingly and helplessly.

And now from the very bottom of her heart she exclaimed: "If I'd ever had a chance like some girls—if I'd ever been anywhere or seen anything! But just to be brought up in the country and without any money or clothes or anything—and nobody to show you. Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh!"

The moment she said these things she was actually ashamed of having made so weak and self-condemnatory a confession, since that was what really was troubling him in connection with her, no doubt.

"Oh, Roberta, darling," he said instantly and tenderly, putting his arms around her, genuinely moved by his own dereliction. "You mustn't cry like that, dearest. You mustn't. I didn't mean to hurt you, honest I didn't. Truly, I didn't, dear. I know you've had a hard time, honey. I know how you feel, and how you've been up against things in one way and another. Sure I do, Bert, and you mustn't cry, dearest. I love you just the same. Truly I do, and I always will. I'm sorry if I've hurt you, honest I am. I couldn't help it to-night if I didn't come, honest, or last Friday either. Why, it just wasn't possible. But I won't be so mean like that any more, if I can help it. Honest I won't. You're the sweetest, dearest girl. And you've got such lovely hair and eyes, and such a pretty little figure. Honest you have, Bert. And you can dance too, as pretty as anybody. And you look just as nice, honest you do, dear. Won't you stop now, honey? Please do. I'm so sorry, honey, if I've hurt you in any way."

There was about Clyde at times a certain strain of tenderness, evoked by experiences, disappointments, and hardships in his own life, which came out to one and another, almost any other, under such circumstances as these. At such times he had a soft and melting voice. His manner was as tender and gentle almost as that of a mother with a baby. It drew a girl like Roberta intensely to him. At the same time, such emotion in him, though vivid, was of brief duration. It was like the rush and flutter of a summer storm—soon come and soon gone. Yet in this instance it was sufficient to cause Roberta to feel that he fully understood and sympathized with her and perhaps liked her all the better for it. Things were not so bad for the moment, anyhow. She had him and his love and sympathy to a very marked degree at any rate, and because of this and her very great comfort in it, and his soothing words, she began to dry her eyes, to say that

she was sorry to think that she was such a cry-baby and that she hoped he would forgive her, because in crying she had wet the bosom of his spotless white shirt with her tears. And she would not do it any more if Clyde would just forgive her this once—the while, touched by a passion he scarcely believed was buried in her in any such volume, he now continued to kiss her hands, cheeks, and finally her lips.

And between these pettings and coaxings and kissings it was that he reaffirmed to her, most foolishly and falsely in this instance (since he was really caring for Sondra in a way which, while different, was just as vital—perhaps even more so), that he regarded her as first, last and most in his heart, always—a statement which caused her to feel that perhaps after all she might have misjudged him. Also that her position, if anything, was more secure, if not more wonderful than ever it had been before—far superior to that of these other girls who might see him socially perhaps, but who did not have him to love them in this wonderful way.

CHAPTER XXXII

CLYDE now was actually part and parcel of this local winter social scene. The Griffiths having introduced him to their friends and connections, it followed as a matter of course that he would be received in most homes here. But in this very limited world, where quite every one who was anything at all knew every one else, the state of one's purse was as much, and in some instances even more, considered than one's social connections. For these local families of distinction were convinced that not only one's family but one's wealth was the be-all and end-all of every happy union meant to include social security. And in consequence, while considering Clyde as one who was unquestionably eligible socially, still, because it had been whispered about that his means were very slender, they were not inclined to look upon him as one who might aspire to marriage with any of their daughters. Hence, while they were to the fore with invitations, still in so far as their own children and connections were concerned they were also to the fore with precautionary hints as to the inadvisability of too numerous contacts with him.

However, the mood of Sondra and her group being friendly toward him, and the observations and comments of their friends and parents not as yet too definite, Clyde continued to receive invitations to the one type of gathering that most interested him—that which began and ended with dancing. And although his purse was short, he got on well enough. For once Sondra had interested herself in him, it was not long before she began to realize what his financial state was and was concerned to make his friendship for her at least as inexpensive as possible. And because of this attitude on her part, which in turn was conveyed to Bertine, Grant Cranston and others, it became possible on most occasions for Clyde, especially when the affair was local, to go here and there without the expenditure of any money. Even when the affair was at any point beyond Lycurgus and he consented to go, the car of another was delegated to pick him up.

Frequently after the New Year's Eve trip to Schenectady, which proved to be an outing of real import to both Clyde and Sondra—seeing that on that occasion she drew nearer to him

affectionally than ever before—it was Sondra herself who chose to pick him up in her car. He had actually succeeded in impressing her, and in a way that most flattered her vanity at the same time that it appealed to the finest trait in her—a warm desire to have some one, some youth like Clyde, who was at once attractive and of good social station, dependent upon her. She knew that her parents would not countenance an affair between her and Clyde because of his poverty. She had originally not contemplated any, though now she found herself wishing that something of the kind might be.

However, no opportunity for further intimacies occurred until one night about two weeks after the New Year's Eve party. They were returning from a similar affair at Amsterdam, and after Bella Griffiths and Grant and Bertine Cranston had been driven to their respective homes, Stuart Finchley had called back: "Now we'll take you home, Griffiths." At once Sondra, swayed by the delight of contact with Clyde and not willing to end it so soon, said: "If you want to come over to our place, I'll make some hot chocolate before you go home. Would you like that?"

"Oh, sure I would," Clyde had answered gayly.

"Here goes then," called Stuart, turning the car toward the Finchley home. "But as for me, I'm going to turn in. It's way after three now."

"That's a good brother. Your beauty sleep, you know," replied Sondra.

And having turned the car into the garage, the three made their way through the rear entrance into the kitchen. Her brother having left them, Sondra asked Clyde to be seated at a servants' table while she brought the ingredients. But he, impressed by this culinary equipment, the like of which he had never seen before, gazed about wondering at the wealth and security which could sustain it.

"My, this is a big kitchen, isn't it?" he remarked. "What a lot of things you have here to cook with, haven't you?"

And she, realizing from this that he had not been accustomed to equipment of this order before coming to Lycurgus and hence was all the more easily to be impressed, replied: "Oh, I don't know. Aren't all kitchens as big as this?"

Clyde, thinking of the poverty he knew, and assuming from this that she was scarcely aware of anything less than this, was all the more overawed by the plethora of the world to which she belonged. What means! Only to think of being married to such a girl, when all such as this would become an everyday

state. One would have a cook and servants, a great house and car, no one to work for, and only orders to give, a thought which impressed him greatly. It made her various self-conscious gestures and posings all the more entrancing. And she, sensing the import of all this to Clyde, was inclined to exaggerate her own inseparable connection with it. To him, more than any one else, as she now saw, she shone as a star, a paragon of luxury and social supremacy.

Having prepared the chocolate in a commonplace aluminum pan, to further impress him she sought out a heavily chased silver service which was in another room. She poured the chocolate into a highly ornamented urn and then carried it to the table and put it down before him. Then swinging herself up beside him, she said: "Now, isn't this chummy? I just love to get out in the kitchen like this, but I can only do it when the cook's out. He won't let any one near the place when he's here."

"Oh, is that so?" asked Clyde, who was quite unaware of the ways of cooks in connection with private homes—an inquiry which quite convinced Sondra that there must have been little if any real means in the world from which he sprang. Nevertheless, because he had come to mean so much to her, she was by no means inclined to turn back. And so when he finally exclaimed: "Isn't it wonderful to be together like this, Sondra? Just think, I hardly got a chance to say a word to you all evening, alone," she replied, without in any way being irritated by the familiarity, "You think so? I'm glad you do," and smiled in a slightly supercilious though affectionate way.

And at the sight of her now in her white satin and crystal evening gown, her slippered feet swinging so intimately near, a faint perfume radiating to his nostrils, he was stirred. In fact, his imagination in regard to her was really inflamed. Youth, beauty, wealth such as this—what would it not mean? And she, feeling the intensity of his admiration and infected in part at least by the enchantment and fervor that was so definitely dominating him, was swayed to the point where she was seeing him as one for whom she could care—very much. Weren't his eyes bright and dark—very liquid and eager? And his hair! It looked so enticing, lying low upon his white forehead. She wished that she could touch it now—smooth it with her hands and touch his cheeks. And his hands—they were thin and sensitive and graceful. Like Roberta, and Hortense and Rita before her, she noticed them.

But he was silent now with a tightly restrained silence which he was afraid to liberate in words. For he was thinking: "Oh,

if only I could say to her how beautiful I really think she is. If I could just put my arms around her and kiss her, and kiss her, and kiss her, and have her kiss me in the same way." And strangely, considering his first approaches toward Roberta, the thought was without lust, just the desire to constrain and fondle a perfect object. Indeed, his eyes fairly radiated this desire and intensity. And while she noted this and was in part made dubious by it, since it was the thing in Clyde she most feared—still she was intrigued by it to the extent of wishing to know its further meaning.

And so she now said, teasingly: "Was there anything very important you wanted to say?"

"I'd like to say a lot of things to you, Sondra, if you would only let me," he returned eagerly. "But you told me not to."

"Oh, so I did. Well, I meant that, too. I'm glad you mind so well." There was a provoking smile upon her lips and she looked at him as much as to say: "But you don't really believe I meant all of that, do you?"

Overcome by the suggestion of her eyes, Clyde got up and, taking both her hands in his and looking directly into her eyes, said: "You didn't mean all of it, then, did you, Sondra? Not all of it, anyhow. Oh, I wish I could tell you all that I am thinking." His eyes spoke, and now sharply conscious again of how easy it was to inflame him, and yet anxious to permit him to proceed as he wished, she leaned back from him and said, "Oh, yes, I'm sure I did. You take almost everything too seriously, don't you?" But at the same time, and in spite of herself, her expression relaxed and she once more smiled.

"I can't help it, Sondra. I can't! I can't!" he began, eagerly and almost vehemently. "You don't know what effect you have on me. You're so beautiful. Oh, you are. You know you are. I think about you all the time. Really I do, Sondra. You've made me just crazy about you, so much so that I can hardly sleep for thinking about you. Gee, I'm wild! I never go anywhere or see you any place but what I think of you all the time afterward. Even to-night when I saw you dancing with all those fellows I could hardly stand it. I just wanted you to be dancing with me—no one else. You've got such beautiful eyes, Sondra, and such a lovely mouth and chin, and such a wonderful smile."

He lifted his hands as though to caress her gently, yet holding them back, and at the same time dreamed into her eyes as might a devotee into those of a saint, then suddenly put his arms about her and drew her close to him. She, thrilled and in part seduced

by his words, instead of resisting as definitely as she would have in any other case, now gazed at him, fascinated by his enthusiasms. She was so trapped and entranced by his passion for her that it seemed to her now as though she might care for him as much as he wished. Very, very much, if she only dared. He, too, was beautiful and alluring to her. He, too, was really wonderful, even if he were poor—so much more intense and dynamic than any of these other youths that she knew here. Would it not be wonderful if, her parents and her state permitting, she could share with him completely such a mood as this? Simultaneously the thought came to her that should her parents know of this it might not be possible for her to continue this relationship in any form, let alone to develop it or enjoy it in the future. Yet regardless of this thought now, which arrested and stilled her for a moment, she continued to yearn toward him. Her eyes were warm and tender—her lips wreathed with a gracious smile.

"I'm sure I oughtn't to let you say all these things to me. I know I shouldn't," she protested weakly, yet looking at him affectionately. "It isn't the right thing to do, I know, but still—"

"Why not? Why isn't it right, Sondra? Why mayn't I when I care for you so much?" His eyes became clouded with sadness, and she, noting it, exclaimed: "Oh, well," then paused, "I—I—" She was about to add, "Don't think they would ever let us go on with it," but instead she only replied, "I guess I don't know you well enough."

"Oh, Sondra, when I love you so much and I'm so crazy about you! Don't you care at all like I care for you?"

Because of the uncertainty expressed by her, his eyes were now seeking, frightened, sad. The combination had an intense appeal for her. She merely looked at him dubiously, wondering what could be the result of such an infatuation as this. And he, noting the wavering something in her own eyes, pulled her closer and kissed her. Instead of resenting it she lay for a moment willingly, joyously, in his arms, then suddenly sat up, the thought of what she was permitting him to do—kiss her in this way—and what it must mean to him, causing her on the instant to recover all her poise. "I think you'd better go now," she said definitely, yet not unkindly. "Don't you?"

And Clyde, who himself had been surprised and afterwards a little startled, and hence reduced by his own boldness, now pleaded rather weakly, and yet submissively. "Angry?"

And she, in turn sensing his submissiveness, that of the slave for the master, and in part liking and in part resenting it, since like Roberta and Hortense, even she preferred to be mastered

rather than to master, shook her head negatively and a little sadly.

"It's very late," was all she said, and smiled tenderly.

And Clyde, realizing that for some reason he must not say more, had not the courage or persistence or the background to go further with her now, went for his coat and, looking sadly but obediently back at her, departed.

CHAPTER XXXIII

ONE of the things that Roberta soon found was that her intuitive notions in regard to all this were not without speedy substantiation. For exactly as before, though with the usual insistence afterward that there was no real help for it, there continued to be these same last moment changes of plan and unannounced absences. And although she complained at times, or pleaded, or merely contented herself with quite silent and not always obvious "blues," still these same affected no real modification or improvement. For Clyde was now hopelessly enamored of Sondra and by no means to be changed, or moved even, by anything in connection with Roberta. Sondra was too wonderful!

At the same time because she was there all of the working hours of each day in the same room with him, he could not fail instinctively to feel some of the thoughts that employed her mind—such dark, sad, despairing thoughts. And these seized upon him at times as definitely and poignantly as though they were voices of accusation or complaint—so much so that he could not help but suggest by way of amelioration that he would like to see her and that he was coming around that night if she were going to be home. And so distrait was she, and still so infatuated with him, that she could not resist admitting that she wanted him to come. And once there, the psychic personality of the past as well as of the room itself was not without its persuasion and hence emotional compulsion.

But most foolishly anticipating, as he now did, a future more substantial than the general local circumstances warranted, he was more concerned than ever lest his present relationship to Roberta should in any way prove inimical to all this. Supposing that Sondra at some time, in some way, should find out concerning Roberta? How fatal that would be! Or that Roberta should become aware of his devotion to Sondra and so develop an active resentment which should carry her to the length of denouncing or exposing him. For subsequent to the New Year's Eve engagement, he was all too frequently appearing at the factory of a morning with explanatory statements that because of some invitation from the Griffiths, Harriets, or others, he would

not be able to keep an engagement with her that night, for instance, that he had made a day or two before. And later, on three different occasions, because Sondra had called for him in her car, he had departed without a word, trusting to what might come to him the next day in the way of an excuse to smooth the matter over.

Yet anomalous, if not exactly unprecedented as it may seem, this condition of mingled sympathy and opposition gave rise at last to the feeling in him that come what might he must find some method of severing this tie, even though it lacerated Roberta to the point of death (Why should he care? He had never told her that he would marry her.) or endangered his own position here in case she were not satisfied to release him as voicelessly as he wished. At other times it caused him to feel that indeed he was a sly and shameless and cruel person who had taken undue advantage of a girl who, left to herself, would never have troubled with him. And this latter mood, in spite of slights and lies and thinly excused neglects and absences at times in the face of the most definite agreements—so strange is the libido of the race—brought about the reënactment of the infernal or celestial command laid upon Adam and his breed: "Thy desire shall be to thy mate."

But there was this to be said in connection with the relationship between these two, that at no time, owing to the inexperience of Clyde, as well as Roberta, had there been any adequate understanding or use of more than the simplest, and for the most part unsatisfactory, contraceptive devices. About the middle of February, and, interestingly enough, at about the time when Clyde, because of the continuing favor of Sondra, had about reached the point where he was determined once and for all to end, not only this physical, but all other connection with Roberta, she on her part was beginning to see clearly that, in spite of his temporizing and her own incurable infatuation for him, pursuit of him by her was futile and that it would be more to the satisfaction of her pride, if not to the ease of her heart, if she were to leave here and in some other place seek some financial help that would permit her to live and still help her parents and forget him if she could. Unfortunately for this, she was compelled, to her dismay and terror, to enter the factory one morning, just about this time, her face a symbol of even graver and more terrifying doubts and fears than any that had hitherto assailed her. For now, in addition to her own troubled conclusions in regard to Clyde, there had sprung up over night the dark and constraining fear that even this might not now be possible, for the present at

least. For because of her own and Clyde's temporizing over his and her sentimentality and her unconquerable affection for him, she now, at a time when it was most inimical for both, found herself pregnant.

Ever since she had yielded to his blandishments, she had counted the days and always had been able to congratulate herself that all was well. But forty-eight hours since the always exactly calculated time had now passed, and there had been no sign. And for four days preceding this Clyde had not even been near her. And his attitude at the factory was more remote and indifferent than ever.

And now, this!

And she had no one but him to whom she might turn. And he was in this estranged and indifferent mood.

Because of her fright, induced by the fear that with or without Clyde's aid she might not easily be extricated from her threatened predicament, she could see her home, her mother, her relatives, all who knew her, and their thoughts in case anything like this should befall her. For of the opinion of society in general and what other people might say, Roberta stood in extreme terror. The stigma of unsanctioned concupiscence! The shame of illegitimacy for a child! It was bad enough, as she had always thought, listening to girls and women talk of life and marriage and adultery and the miseries that had befallen girls who had yielded to men and subsequently been deserted, for a woman when she was safely married and sustained by the love and strength of a man—such love, for instance, as her brother-in-law Gabel brought to her sister Agnes, and her father to her mother in the first years, no doubt—and Clyde to her when he had so feverishly declared that he loved her.

But now—now!

She could not permit any thoughts in regard to his recent or present attitude to delay her. Regardless of either, he must help her. She did not know what else to do under such circumstances —which way to turn. And no doubt Clyde did. At any rate he had said once that he would stand by her in case anything happened. And although, because at first, even on the third day on reaching the factory, she imagined that she might be exaggerating the danger and that it was perhaps some physical flaw or lapse that might still overcome itself, still by late afternoon no evidence of any change coming to her, she began to be a prey to the most nameless terrors. What little courage she had mustered up to this time began to waver and break. She was all alone, unless he came to her now. And she was in need of

advice and good counsel—loving counsel. Oh, Clyde! Clyde! If he would only not be so indifferent to her! He must not be! Something must be done, and right away—quick—else— Great Heavens, what a terrible thing this could easily come to be!

At once she stopped her work between four and five in the afternoon and hurried to the dressing-room. And there she penned a note—hurried, hysterical—a scrawl.

"CLYDE—I must see you to-night, sure, *sure*. You mustn't fail me. I have something to tell you. Please come as soon after work as possible, or meet me anywhere. I'm not angry or mad about anything. But I must see you to-night, *sure*. Please say right away where. ROBERTA."

And he, sensing a new and strange and quite terrified note in all this the moment he read it, at once looked over his shoulder at her and, seeing her face so white and drawn, signaled that he would meet her. For judging by her face the thing she had to tell must be of the utmost importance to her, else why this tensity and excitement on her part. And although he had another engagement later, as he now troublesomely recalled, at the Starks for dinner, still it was necessary to do this first. Yet, what was it anyhow? Was anybody dead or hurt or what—her mother or father or brother or sister?

At five-thirty, he made his way to the appointed place, wondering what it could be that could make her so pale and concerned. Yet at the same time saying to himself that if this other dream in regard to Sondra were to come true he must not let himself be reëntangled by any great or moving sympathy—must maintain his new poise and distance so that Roberta could see that he no longer cared for her as he had. Reaching the appointed place at six o'clock, he found her leaning disconsolately against a tree in the shadow. She looked distraught, despondent.

"Why, what's the matter, Bert? What are you so frightened about? What's happened?"

Even his obviously dwindling affection was restimulated by her quite visible need of help.

"Oh, Clyde," she said at last, "I hardly know how to tell you. It's so terrible for me if it's so." Her voice, tense and yet low, was in itself a clear proof of her anguish and uncertainty.

"Why, what is it, Bert? Why don't you tell me?" he reiterated, briskly and yet cautiously, essaying an air of detached assurance which he could not quite manage in this instance. "What's wrong? What are you so excited about? You're all trembly."

Because of the fact that never before in all his life had he been confronted by any such predicament as this, it did not even now occur to him just what the true difficulty could be. At the same time, being rather estranged and hence embarrassed by his recent treatment of her, he was puzzled as to just what attitude to assume in a situation where obviously something was wrong. Being sensitive to conventional or moral stimuli as he still was, he could not quite achieve a discreditable thing, even where his own highest ambitions were involved, without a measure of regret or at least shame. Also he was so anxious to keep his dinner engagement and not to be further involved that his manner was impatient. It did not escape Roberta.

"You know, Clyde," she pleaded, both earnestly and eagerly, the very difficulty of her state encouraging her to be bold and demanding, "you said if anything went wrong you'd help me."

At once, because of those recent few and, as he now saw them, foolish visits to her room, on which occasions because of some remaining sentiment and desire on the part of both he had been betrayed into sporadic and decidedly unwise physical relations with her, he now realized what the difficulty was. And that it was a severe, compelling, dangerous difficulty, if it were true. Also that he was to blame and that here was a real predicament that must be overcome, and that quickly, unless a still greater danger was to be faced. Yet, simultaneously, his very recent and yet decidedly compelling indifference dictating, he was almost ready now to assume that this might be little more than a ruse or lovelorn device or bit of strategy intended to retain or reënlist his interest in spite of himself—a thought which he was only in part ready to harbor. Her manner was too dejected and despairing. And with the first dim realization of how disastrous such a complication as this might prove to be in his case, he began to be somewhat more alarmed than irritated. So much so that he exclaimed:

"Yes, but how do you know that there is anything wrong? You can't be sure so soon as all this, can you? How can you? You'll probably be all right to-morrow, won't you?" At the same time his voice was beginning to suggest the uncertainty that he felt.

"Oh, no, I don't think so, Clyde. I wish I did. It's two whole days, and it's never been that way before."

Her manner as she said this was so obviously dejected and self-commiserating that at once he was compelled to dismiss the thought of intrigue. At the same time, unwilling to face so discouraging a fact so soon, he added: "Oh, well, that might not

mean anything, either. Girls go longer than two days, don't they?"

The tone, implying as it did uncertainty and non-sophistication even, which previously had not appeared characteristic of him, was sufficient to alarm Roberta to the point where she exclaimed: "Oh, no, I don't think so. Anyhow, it would be terrible, wouldn't it, if something were wrong? What do you suppose I ought to do? Don't you know something I can take?"

At once Clyde, who had been so brisk and urgent in establishing this relationship and had given Roberta the impression that he was a sophisticated and masterful youth who knew much more of life than ever she could hope to know, and to whom all such dangers and difficulties as were implied in the relationship could be left with impunity, was at a loss what to do. Actually, as he himself now realized, he was as sparingly informed in regard to the mysteries of sex and the possible complications attending upon such a situation as any youth of his years could well be. True, before coming here he had browsed about Kansas City and Chicago with such worldly-wise mentors of the hotel bell-boy world as Ratterer, Higby, Hegglund and others and had listened to much of their gossiping and boasting. But their knowledge, for all their boasting, as he now half guessed, must have related to girls who were as careless and uninformed as themselves. And beyond those again, although he was by no means so clearly aware of that fact now, lay little more than those rumored specifics and preventatives of such quack doctors and shady druggists and chemists as dealt with intelligences of the Hegglund and Ratterer order. But even so, where were such things to be obtained in a small city like Lycurgus? Since dropping Dillard he had no intimates let alone trustworthy friends who could be depended on to help in such a crisis.

The best he could think of for the moment was to visit some local or near-by druggist who might, for a price, provide him with some worth-while prescription or information. But for how much? And what were the dangers in connection with such a proceeding? Did they talk? Did they ask questions? Did they tell any one else about such inquiries or needs? He looked so much like Gilbert Griffiths, who was so well known in Lycurgus that any one recognizing him as Gilbert might begin to talk of him in that way and so bring about trouble.

And this terrible situation arising now—when in connection with Sondra, things had advanced to the point where she was now secretly permitting him to kiss her, and, more pleasing still, exhibiting little evidences of her affection and good will in the

form of presents of ties, a gold pencil, a box of most attractive handkerchiefs, all delivered to his door in his absence with a little card with her initials, which had caused him to feel sure that his future in connection with her was of greater and greater promise. So much so that even marriage, assuming that her family might not prove too inimical and that her infatuation and diplomacy endured, might not be beyond the bounds of possibility. He could not be sure, of course. Her true intentions and affection so far were veiled behind a tantalizing evasiveness which made her all the more desirable. Yet it was these things that had been causing him to feel that he must now, and speedily, extract himself as gracefully and unirritatingly as possible from his intimacy with Roberta.

For that reason, therefore, he now announced, with pretended assurance: "Well, I wouldn't worry about it any more to-night if I were you. You may be all right yet, you know. You can't be sure. Anyhow, I'll have to have a little time until I can see what I can do. I think I can get something for you. But I wish you wouldn't get so excited."

At the same time he was far from feeling as secure as he sounded. In fact he was very much shaken. His original determination to have as little to do with her as possible, was now complicated by the fact that he was confronted by a predicament that spelled real danger to himself, unless by some argument or assertion he could absolve himself of any responsibility in connection with this—a possibility which, in view of the fact that Roberta still worked for him, that he had written her some notes, and that any least word from her would precipitate an inquiry which would prove fatal to him, was sufficient to cause him to feel that he must assist her speedily and without a breath of information as to all this leaking out in any direction. At the same time it is only fair to say that because of all that had been between them, he did not object to assisting her in any way that he could. But in the event that he could not (it was so that his thoughts raced forward to an entirely possible inimical conclusion to all this) well, then—well, then—might it not be possible at least—some fellows, if not himself would—to deny that he had held any such relationship with her and so escape. That possibly might be one way out—if only he were not as treacherously surrounded as he was here.

But the most troublesome thing in connection with all this was the thought that he knew of nothing that would really avail in such a case, other than a doctor. Also that that probably meant money, time, danger—just what did it mean? He would

see her in the morning, and if she weren't all right by then he would act.

And Roberta, for the first time forsaken in this rather casual and indifferent way, and in such a crisis as this, returned to her room with her thoughts and fears, more stricken and agonized than ever before she had been in all her life.

CHAPTER XXXIV

BUT the resources of Clyde, in such a situation as this, were slim. For, apart from Liggett, Whiggam, and a few minor though decidedly pleasant and yet rather remote department heads, all of whom were now looking on him as a distinctly superior person who could scarcely be approached too familiarly in connection with anything, there was no one to whom he could appeal. In so far as the social group to which he was now so eagerly attaching himself was concerned, it would have been absurd for him to attempt, however slyly, to extract any information there. For while the youths of this world at least were dashing here and there, and because of their looks, taste and means indulging themselves in phases of libertinism—the proper wild oats of youth—such as he and others like himself could not have dreamed of affording, still so far was he from any real intimacy with any of these that he would not have dreamed of approaching them for helpful information.

His sanest thought, which occurred to him almost immediately after leaving Roberta, was that instead of inquiring of any druggist or doctor or person in Lycurgus—more particularly any doctor, since the entire medical profession here, as elsewhere, appeared to him as remote, cold, unsympathetic and likely very expensive and unfriendly to such an immoral adventure as this—was to go to some near-by city, preferably Schenectady, since it was larger and as near as any, and there inquire what, if anything, could be obtained to help in such a situation as this. For he must find something.

At the same time, the necessity for decision and prompt action was so great that even on his way to the Starks', and without knowing any drug or prescription to ask for, he resolved to go to Schenectady the next night. Only that meant, as he later reasoned, that a whole day must elapse before anything could be done for Roberta, and that, in her eyes, as well as his own, would be leaving her open to the danger that any delay at all involved. Therefore, he decided to act at once, if he could; excuse himself to the Starks and then make the trip to Schenectady on the interurban before the drug-stores over there should close. But

once there—what? How face the local druggist or clerk—and ask for what? His mind was troubled with hard, abrasive thoughts as to what the druggist might think, look or say. If only Ratterer or Hegglund were here! They would know, of course, and be glad to help him. Or Higby, even. But here he was now, all alone, for Roberta knew nothing at all. There must be something though, of course. If not, if he failed there, he would return and write Ratterer in Chicago, only in order to keep himself out of this as much as possible he would say that he was writing for a friend.

Once in Schenectady, since no one knew him there, of course he might say (the thought came to him as an inspiration) that he was a newly married man—why not? He was old enough to be one, and that his wife, and that in the face of inability to care for a child now, was "past her time" (he recalled a phrase that he had once heard Higby use), and that he wanted something that would permit her to escape from that state. What was so wrong with that as an idea? A young married couple might be in just such a predicament. And possibly the druggist would, or should be stirred to a little sympathy by such a state and might be glad to tell him of something. Why not? That would be no real crime. To be sure, one and another might refuse, but a third might not. And then he would be rid of this. And then never again, without knowing a lot more than he did now, would he let himself drift into any such predicament as this. Never! It was too dreadful.

He betook himself to the Stark house very nervous and growing more so every moment. So much so that, the dinner being eaten, he finally declared as early as nine-thirty that at the last moment at the factory a very troublesome report, covering a whole month's activities, had been requested of him. And since it was not anything he could do at the office, he was compelled to return to his room and make it out there—a bit of energetic and ambitious commercialism, as the Starks saw it, worthy of their admiration and sympathy. And in consequence he was excused.

But arrived at Schenectady, he had barely time to look around a little before the last car for Lycurgus should be leaving. His nerve began to fail him. Did he look enough like a young married man to convince any one that he was one? Besides were not such preventatives considered very wrong—even by druggists?

Walking up and down the one very long Main Street still brightly lighted at this hour, looking now in one drug-store

window and another, he decided for different reasons that each particular one was not the one. In one, as he saw at a glance, stood a stout, sober, smooth-shaven man of fifty whose bespectacled eyes and iron gray hair seemed to indicate to Clyde's mind that he would be most certain to deny such a youthful applicant as himself—refuse to believe that he was married—or to admit that he had any such remedy, and suspect him of illicit relations with some young, unmarried girl into the bargain. He looked so sober, God-fearing, ultra-respectable and conventional. No, it would not do to apply to him. He had not the courage to enter and face such a person.

In another drug-store he observed a small, shriveled and yet dapper and shrewd-looking man of perhaps thirty-five, who appeared to him at the time as satisfactory enough, only, as he could see from the front, he was being briskly assisted by a young woman of not more than twenty or twenty-five. And assuming that she would approach him instead of the man—an embarrassing and impossible situation—or if the man waited on him, was it not probable that she would hear? In consequence he gave up that place, and a third, a fourth, and a fifth, for varying and yet equally cogent reasons—customers inside, a girl and a boy at a soda fountain in front, an owner posed near the door and surveying Clyde as he looked in and thus disconcerting him before he had time to consider whether he should enter or not.

Finally, however, after having abandoned so many, he decided that he must act or return defeated, his time and carfare wasted. Returning to one of the lesser stores in a side street, in which a moment before he had observed an undersized chemist idling about, he entered, and summoning all the bravado he could muster, began: "I want to know something. I want to know if you know of anything—well, you see, it's this way—I'm just married and my wife is past her time and I can't afford to have any children now if I can help it. Is there anything a person can get that will get her out of it?"

His manner was brisk and confidential enough, although tinged with nervousness and the inner conviction that the druggist must guess that he was lying. At the same time, although he did not know it, he was talking to a confirmed religionist of the Methodist group who did not believe in interfering with the motives or impulses of nature. Any such trifling was against the laws of God and he carried nothing in stock that would in any way interfere with the ways of the Creator. At the same time he was too good a merchant to wish to alienate a possible future customer, and so he now said: "I'm sorry, young man, but I'm

afraid I can't help you in this case. I haven't a thing of that kind in stock here—never handle anything of that kind because I don't believe in 'em. It may be, though, that some of the other stores here in town carry something of the sort. I wouldn't be able to tell you." His manner as he spoke was solemn, the convinced and earnest tone and look of the moralist who knows that he is right.

And at once Clyde gathered, and fairly enough in this instance, that this man was reproachful. It reduced to a much smaller quantity the little confidence with which he had begun his quest. And yet, since the dealer had not directly reproached him and had even said that it might be possible that some of the other druggists carried such a thing, he took heart after a few moments, and after a brief fit of pacing here and there in which he looked through one window and another, he finally espied a seventh dealer alone. He entered, and after repeating his first explanation he was informed, very secretively and yet casually, by the thin, dark, casuistic person who waited on him—not the owner in this instance—that there was such a remedy. Yes. Did he wish a box? That (because Clyde asked the price) would be six dollars—a staggering sum to the salaried inquirer. However, since the expenditure seemed unescapable—to find anything at all a great relief—he at once announced that he would take it, and the clerk, bringing him something which he hinted ought to prove "effectual" and wrapping it up, he paid and went out.

And then actually so relieved was he, so great had been the strain up to this moment, that he could have danced for joy. Then there was a cure, and it would work, of course. The excessive and even outrageous price seemed to indicate as much. And under the circumstances, might he not even consider that sum moderate, seeing that he was being let off so easily? However, he forgot to inquire as to whether there was any additional information or special directions that might prove valuable, and instead, with the package in his pocket, some central and detached portion of the ego within himself congratulating him upon his luck and undaunted efficiency in such a crisis as this, he at once returned to Lycurgus, where he proceeded to Roberta's room.

And she, like himself, impressed by his success in having secured something which both he and she had feared did not exist, or if it did, might prove difficult to procure, felt enormously relieved. In fact, she was reimpressed by his ability and efficiency, qualities with which, up to this time at least, she had endowed him. Also that he was more generous and considerate than under

the circumstances she feared he would be. At least he was not coldly abandoning her to fate, as previously in her terror she had imagined that he might. And this fact, even in the face of his previous indifference, was sufficient to soften her mood in regard to him. So with a kind of ebullience, based on fattened hope resting on the pills, she undid the package and read the directions, assuring him the while of her gratitude and that she would not forget how *good* he had been to her in this instance. At the same time, even as she untied the package, the thought came to her—supposing they would not work? Then what? And how would she go about arranging with Clyde as to that? However, for the time being, as she now reasoned, she must be satisfied and grateful for this, and at once took one of the pills.

But once her expressions of gratefulness had been offered and Clyde sensed that these same might possibly be looked upon as overtures to a new intimacy between them, he fell back upon the attitude that for days past had characterized him at the factory. Under no circumstances must he lend himself to any additional blandishments or languishments in this field. And if this drug proved effectual, as he most earnestly hoped, it must be the last of any save the most accidental and casual contacts. For there was too much danger, as this particular crisis had proved—too much to be lost on his side—everything, in short—nothing but worry and trouble and expense.

In consequence he retreated to his former reserve. "Well, you'll be all right now, eh? Anyhow, let's hope so, huh? It says to take one every two hours for eight or ten hours. And if you're just a little sick, it says it doesn't make any difference. You may have to knock off a day or two at the factory, but you won't mind that, will you, if it gets you out of this? I'll come around to-morrow night and see how you are, if you don't show up any time to-morrow."

He laughed genially, the while Roberta gazed at him, unable to associate his present casual attitude with his former passion and deep solicitude. His former passion! And now this! And yet, under the circumstances, being truly grateful, she now smiled cordially and he the same. Yet, seeing him go out, the door close, and no endearing demonstrations of any kind having been exchanged between them, she returned to her bed, shaking her head dubiously. For, supposing that this remedy did not work after all? And he continued in this same casual and remote attitude toward her? Then what? For unless this remedy proved effectual, he might still be so indifferent that he might not want to help her long—or would he? Could he do that,

really? He was the one who had brought her to this difficulty, and against her will, and he had so definitely assured her that nothing would happen. And now she must lie here alone and worry, not a single person to turn to, except him, and he was leaving her for others with the assurance that she would be all right. And he had caused it all! Was that quite right?

"Oh, Clyde! Clyde!"

CHAPTER XXXV

BUT the remedy he purchased failed to work. And because of nausea and his advice she had not gone to the factory, but lay about worrying. But, no saving result appearing, she began to take two pills every hour instead of one—eager at any cost to escape the fate which seemingly had overtaken her. And this made her exceedingly sick—so much so that when Clyde arrived at six-thirty he was really moved by her deathly white face, drawn cheeks and large and nervous eyes, the pupils of which were unduly dilated. Obviously she was facing a crisis, and because of him, and, while it frightened, at the same time it made him sorry for her. Still, so confused and perplexed was he by the problem which her unchanged state presented to him that his mind now leaped forward to the various phases and eventualities of such a failure as this. The need of additional advice or service of some physician somewhere! But where and how and who? And besides, as he now asked himself, where was he to obtain the money in any such event?

Plainly in view of no other inspiration it was necessary for him to return to the druggist at once and there inquire if there was anything else—some other drug or some other thing that one might do. Or if not that, then some low-priced shady doctor somewhere, who, for a small fee, or a promise of payments on time, would help in this case.

Yet even though this other matter was so important—tragic almost—once outside his spirits lifted slightly. For he now recalled that he had an appointment with Sondra at the Cranstons', where at nine he and she, along with a number of others, were to meet and play about as usual—a party. Yet once at the Cranstons', and despite the keen allurement of Sondra, he could not keep his mind off Roberta's state, which rose before him as a specter. Supposing now any one of those whom he found gathered here—Nadine Harriet, Perley Haynes, Violet Taylor, Jill Trumbull, Bella, Bertine, and Sondra, should gain the least inkling of the scene he had just witnessed? In spite of Sondra at the piano throwing him a welcoming smile over her shoulder as he entered, his thoughts were on Roberta. He must go around there again after this was over, to see how she was and so relieve

his own mind in case she were better. In case she was not, he must write to Ratterer at once for advice.

In spite of his distress he was trying to appear as gay and unconcerned as ever—dancing first with Perley Haynes and then with Nadine and finally, while waiting for a chance to dance with Sondra, he approached a group who were trying to help Vanda Steele solve a new scenery puzzle and asserted that he could read messages written on paper and sealed in envelopes (the old serial letter trick which he had found explained in an ancient book of parlor tricks discovered on a shelf at the Peytons'). It had been his plan to use it before in order to give himself an air of ease and cleverness, but to-night he was using it to take his mind off the greater problem that was weighing on him. And, although with the aid of Nadine Harriet, whom he took into his confidence, he succeeded in thoroughly mystifying the others, still his mind was not quite on it. Roberta was always there. Supposing something should really be wrong with her and he could not get her out of it. She might even expect him to marry her, so fearful was she of her parents and people. What would he do then? He would lose the beautiful Sondra and she might even come to know how and why he had lost her. But that would be wild of Roberta to expect him to do that. He would not do it. He could not do it.

One thing was certain. He must get her out of this. He must! But how? How?

And although at twelve o'clock Sondra signaled that she was ready to go and that if he chose he might accompany her to her door (and even stop in for a few moments) and although once there, in the shade of a pergola which ornamented the front gate, she had allowed him to kiss her and told him that she was beginning to think he was the nicest ever and that the following spring when the family moved to Twelfth Lake she was going to see if she couldn't think of some way by which she could arrange to have him there over week-ends, still, because of this pressing problem in connection with Roberta, Clyde was so worried that he was not able to completely enjoy this new and to him exquisitely thrilling demonstration of affection on her part—this new and amazing social and emotional victory of his.

He must send that letter to Ratterer to-night. But before that he must return to Roberta as he had promised and find out if she was better. And after that he must go over to Schenectady in the morning, sure, to see the druggist over there. For something must be done about this unless she were better to-night.

And so, with Sondra's kisses thrilling on his lips, he left her

to go to Roberta, whose white face and troubled eyes told him as he entered her room that no change had taken place. If anything she was worse and more distressed than before, the larger dosage having weakened her to the point of positive illness. However, as she said, nothing mattered if only she could get out of this—that she would almost be willing to die rather than face the consequences. And Clyde, realizing what she meant and being so sincerely concerned for himself, appeared in part distressed for her. However, his previous indifference and the manner in which he had walked off and left her alone this very evening prevented her from feeling that there was any abiding concern in him for her now. And this grieved her terribly. For she sensed now that he did not really care for her any more, even though now he was saying that she mustn't worry and that it was likely that if these didn't work he would get something else that would; that he was going back to the druggist at Schenectady the first thing in the morning to see if there wasn't something else that he could suggest.

But the Gilpins had no telephone, and since he never ventured to call at her room during the day and he never permitted her to call him at Mrs. Peyton's, his plan in this instance was to pass by the following morning before work. If she were all right, the two front shades would be raised to the top; if not, then lowered to the center. In that case he would depart for Schenectady at once, telephoning Mr. Liggett that he had some outside duties to perform.

Just the same, both were terribly depressed and fearful as to what this should mean for each of them. Clyde could not quite assure himself that, in the event that Roberta was not extricated, he would be able to escape without indemnifying her in some form which might not mean just temporary efforts to aid her, but something more—marriage, possibly—since already she had reminded him that he had promised to see her through. But what had he really meant by that at the time that he said it, he now asked himself. Not marriage, most certainly, since his thought was not that he had ever wanted to marry her, but rather just to play with her happily in love, although, as he well knew, she had no such conception of his eager mood at that time. He was compelled to admit to himself that she had probably thought his intentions were more serious or she would not have submitted to him at all.

But reaching home, and after writing and mailing the letter to Ratterer, Clyde passed a troubled night. Next morning he paid a visit to the druggist at Schenectady, the curtains of

Roberta's windows having been lowered to the center when he passed. But on this occasion the latter had no additional aid to offer other than the advisability of a hot and hence weakening bath, which he had failed to mention in the first instance. Also some wearying form of physical exercise. But noting Clyde's troubled expression and judging that the situation was causing him great worry, he observed: "Of course, the fact that your wife has skipped a month doesn't mean that there is anything seriously wrong, you know. Women do that sometimes. Anyhow, you can't ever be sure until the second month has passed. Any doctor will tell you that. If she's nervous, let her try something like this. But even if it fails to work, you can't be positive. She might be all right next month just the same."

Thinly cheered by this information, Clyde was about to depart, for Roberta might be wrong. He and she might be worrying needlessly. Still—he was brought up with a round turn as he thought of it—there might be real danger, and waiting until the end of the second period would only mean that a whole month had elapsed and nothing helpful accomplished—a freezing thought. In consequence he now observed: "In case things don't come right, you don't happen to know of a doctor she could go to, do you? This is rather a serious business for both of us, and I'd like to get her out of it if I could."

Something about the way in which Clyde said this—his extreme nervousness as well as his willingness to indulge in a form of malpractice which the pharmacist by some logic all his own considered very different from just swallowing a preparation intended to achieve the same result—caused him to look suspiciously at Clyde, the thought stirring in his brain that very likely after all Clyde was not married, also that this was one of those youthful affairs which spelled license and future difficulty for some unsophisticated girl. Hence his mood now changed, and instead of being willing to assist, he now said coolly: "Well, there may be a doctor around here, but if so I don't know. And I wouldn't undertake to send any one to a doctor like that. It's against the law. It would certainly go hard with any doctor around here who was caught doing that sort of thing. That's not to say, though, that you aren't at liberty to look around for yourself, if you want to," he added gravely, giving Clyde a suspicious and examining glance, and deciding it were best if he had nothing further to do with such a person.

Clyde therefore returned to Roberta with the same prescription renewed, although she had most decidedly protested that,

since the first box had not worked, it was useless to get more. But since he insisted, she was willing to try the drug the new way, although the argument that a cold or nerves was the possible cause was only sufficient to convince her that Clyde was at the end of his resources in so far as she was concerned, or if not that, he was far from being alive to the import of this both to herself and to him. And supposing this new treatment did not work, then what? Was he going to stop now and let the thing rest there?

Yet so peculiar was Clyde's nature that in the face of his fears in regard to his future, and because it was far from pleasant to be harried in this way and an infringement on his other interests, the assurance that the delay of a month might not prove fatal was sufficient to cause him to be willing to wait, and that rather indifferently, for that length of time. Roberta might be wrong. She might be making all this trouble for nothing. He must see how she felt after she had tried this new way.

But the treatment failed. Despite the fact that in her distress Roberta returned to the factory in order to weary herself, until all the girls in the department assured her that she must be ill—that she should not be working when she looked and plainly felt so bad—still nothing came of it. And the fact that Clyde could dream of falling back on the assurance of the druggist that a first month's lapse was of no import only aggravated and frightened her the more.

The truth was that in this crisis he was as interesting an illustration of the enormous handicaps imposed by ignorance, youth, poverty and fear as one could have found. Technically he did not even know the meaning of the word "midwife," or the nature of the services performed by her. (And there were three here in Lycurgus at this time in the foreign family section.) Again, he had been in Lycurgus so short a time, and apart from the young society men and Dillard whom he had cut, and the various department heads at the factory, he knew no one—an occasional barber, haberdasher, cigar dealer and the like, the majority of whom, as he saw them, were either too dull or too ignorant for his purpose.

One thing, however, which caused him to pause before ever he decided to look up a physician was the problem of who was to approach him and how. To go himself was simply out of the question. In the first place, he looked too much like Gilbert Griffiths, who was decidedly too well-known here and for whom he might be mistaken. Next, it was unquestionable that, being

as well-dressed as he was, the physician would want to charge him more, maybe, than he could afford and ask him all sorts of embarrassing questions, whereas if it could be arranged through some one else—the details explained before ever Roberta was sent— Why not Roberta herself! Why not? She looked so simple and innocent and unassuming and appealing at all times. And in such a situation as this, as depressed and downcast as she was, well . . . For after all, as he now casuistically argued with himself, it was she and not he who was facing the immediate problem which had to be solved.

And again, as it now came to him, would she not be able to get it done cheaper? For looking as she did now, so distrait— If only he could get her to say that she had been deserted by some young man, whose name she would refuse to divulge, of course, well, what physician seeing a girl like her alone and in such a state—no one to look after her—would refuse her? It might even be that he would help her out for nothing. Who could tell? And that would leave him clear of it all.

And in consequence he now approached Roberta, intending to prepare her for the suggestion that, assuming that he could provide a physician and the nature of his position being what it was, she must speak for herself. But before he had spoken she at once inquired of him as to what, if anything, more he had heard or done. Wasn't some other remedy sold somewhere? And this giving him the opportunity he desired, he explained: "Well, I've asked around and looked into most of the drug-stores and they tell me if this one won't work that none will. That leaves me sorta stumped now, unless you're willing to go and see a doctor. But the trouble with that is they're hard to find—the ones who'll do anything and keep their mouths shut. I've talked with several fellows without saying who it's for, of course, but it ain't so easy to get one around here, because they are all too much afraid. It's against the law, you see. But what I want to know now is, supposing I find a doctor who would do it, will you have the nerve to go and see him and tell him what the trouble is? That's what I want to know."

She looked at him dazedly, not quite grasping that he was hinting that she was to go entirely alone, but rather assuming that of course he meant to go with her. Then, her mind concentrating nervously upon the necessity of facing a doctor in his company, she first exclaimed: "Oh, dear, isn't it terrible to think of us having to go to a doctor in this way? Then he'll know all about us, won't he? And besides it's dangerous, isn't it, al-

though I don't suppose it could be much worse than those old pills." She went off into more intimate inquiries as to what was done and how, but Clyde could not enlighten her.

"Oh, don't be getting nervous over that now," he said. "It isn't anything that's going to hurt you, I know. Besides we'll be lucky if we find some one to do it. What I want to know is if I do find a doctor, will you be willing to go to him alone?" She started as if struck, but unabashed now he went on, "As things stand with me here, I can't go with you, that's sure. I'm too well known around here, and besides I look too much like Gilbert and he's known to everybody. If I should be mistaken for him, or be taken for his cousin or relative, well, then the jig's up."

His eyes were not only an epitome of how wretched he would feel were he exposed to all Lycurgus for what he was, but also in them lurked a shadow of the shabby rôle he was attempting to play in connection with her—in hiding thus completely behind her necessity. And yet so tortured was he by the fear of what was about to befall him in case he did not succeed in so doing, that he was now prepared, whatever Roberta might think or say, to stand his ground. But Roberta, sensing only the fact that he was thinking of sending her alone, now exclaimed incredulously: "Not alone, Clyde! Oh, no, I couldn't do that! Oh, dear, no! Why, I'd be frightened to death. Oh, dear, no. Why, I'd be so frightened I wouldn't know what to do. Just think how I'd feel, trying to explain to him alone. I just couldn't do that. Besides, how would I know what to say—how to begin? You'll just have to go with me at first, that's all, and explain, or I never can go—I don't care what happens." Her eyes were round and excited and her face, while registering all the depression and fear that had recently been there, was transfigured by definite opposition.

But Clyde was not to be shaken either.

"You know how it is with me here, Bert. I can't go, and that's all there is to it. Why, supposing I were seen—supposing some one should recognize me? What then? You know how much I've been going around here since I've been here. Why, it's crazy to think that I could go. Besides, it will be a lot easier for you than for me. No doctor's going to think anything much of your coming to him, especially if you're alone. He'll just think you're some one who's got in trouble and with no one to help you. But if I go, and it should be any one who knows anything about the Griffiths, there'd be the deuce to pay. Right off he'd think I was stuffed with money. Besides, if I didn't do

just what he wanted me to do afterwards, he could go to my uncle, or my cousin, and then, good-night! That would be the end of me. And if I lost my place here now, and with no money and that kind of a scandal connected with me, where do you suppose I would be after that, or you either? I certainly couldn't look after you then. And then what would you do? I should think you'd wake up and see what a tough proposition this is. My name can't be pulled into this without trouble for both of us. It's got to be kept out, that's all, and the only way for me to keep it out is for me to stay away from any doctor. Besides, he'd feel a lot sorrier for you than he would for me. You can't tell me!"

His eyes were distressed and determined, and, as Roberta could gather from his manner, a certain hardness, or at least defiance, the result of fright, showed in every gesture. He was determined to protect his own name, come what might—a fact which, because of her own acquiescence up to this time, still carried great weight with her.

"Oh, dear! dear!" she exclaimed, nervously and sadly now, the growing and drastic terror of the situation dawning upon her, "I don't see how we are to do then. I really don't. For I can't do that and that's all there is to it. It's all so hard—so terrible. I'd feel too much ashamed and frightened to ever go alone."

But even as she said this she began to feel that she might, and even would, go alone, if must be. For what else was there to do? And how was she to compel him, in the face of his own fears and dangers, to jeopardize his position here? He began once more, in self-defense more than from any other motive:

"Besides, unless this thing isn't going to cost very much, I don't see how I'm going to get by with it anyhow, Bert. I really don't. I don't make so very much, you know—only twenty-five dollars up to now." (Necessity was at last compelling him to speak frankly with Roberta.) "And I haven't saved anything—not a cent. And you know why as well as I do. We spent the most of it together. Besides if I go and he thought I had money, he might want to charge me more than I could possibly dig up. But if you go and just tell him how things are—and that you haven't got anything—if you'd only say I'd run away or something, see—"

He paused because, as he said it, he saw a flicker of shame, contempt, despair at being connected with anything so cheap and shabby, pass over Roberta's face. And yet in spite of this sly and yet muddy tergiversation on his part—so great is the compelling and enlightening power of necessity—she could still

see that there was some point to his argument. He might be trying to use her as a foil, a mask, behind which he, and she too for that matter, was attempting to hide. But just the same, shameful as it was, here were the stark, bald headlands of fact, and at their base the thrashing, destroying waves of necessity. She heard him say: "You wouldn't have to give your right name, you know, or where you came from. I don't intend to pick out any doctor right around here, see. Then, if you'd tell him you didn't have much money—just your weekly salary—"

She sat down weakly to think, the while this persuasive trickery proceeded from him—the import of most of his argument going straight home. For as false and morally meretricious as this whole plan was, still, as she could see for herself, her own as well as Clyde's situation was desperate. And as honest and punctilious as she might ordinarily be in the matter of truth-telling and honest-dealing, plainly this was one of those whirling tempests of fact and reality in which the ordinary charts and compasses of moral measurement were for the time being of small use.

And so, insisting then that they go to some doctor far away, Utica or Albany, maybe—but still admitting by this that she would go—the conversation was dropped. And he having triumphed in the matter of excepting his own personality from this, took heart to the extent, at least, of thinking that at once now, by some hook or crook, he must find a doctor to whom he could send her. Then his terrible troubles in connection with all this would be over. And after that she could go her way, as surely she must; then, seeing that he would have done all that he could for her he would go his to the glorious dénouement that lay directly before him in case only this were adjusted.

CHAPTER XXXVI

NEVERTHELESS hours and even days, and finally a week and then ten days, passed without any word from him as to the whereabouts of a doctor to whom she could go. For although having said so much to her he still did not know to whom to apply. And each hour and day as great a menace to him as to her. And her looks as well as her inquiries registering how intense and vital and even clamorous at moments was her own distress. Also he was harried almost to the point of nervous collapse by his own inability to think of any speedy and sure way by which she might be aided. Where did a physician live to whom he might send her with some assurance of relief for her, and how was he to find out about him?

After a time, however, in running over all the names of those he knew, he finally struck upon a forlorn hope in the guise of Orrin Short, the young man conducting the one small "gents' furnishing store" in Lycurgus which catered more or less exclusively to the rich youths of the city—a youth of about his own years and proclivities, as Clyde had guessed, who ever since he had been here had been useful to him in the matter of tips as to dress and style in general. Indeed, as Clyde had for some time noted, Short was a brisk, inquiring and tactful person, who, in addition to being quite attractive personally to girls, was also always most courteous to his patrons, particularly to those whom he considered above him in the social scale, and among these was Clyde. For having discovered that Clyde was related to the Griffiths, this same Short had sought, as a means for his own general advancement in other directions, to scrape as much of a genial and intimate relationship with him as possible, only, as Clyde saw it, and in view of the general attitude of his very high relatives, it had not, up to this time at least, been possible for him to consider any such intimacy seriously. And yet, finding Short so very affable and helpful in general, he was not above reaching at least an easy and genial surface relationship with him, which Short appeared to accept in good part. Indeed, as at first, his manner remained seeking and not a little sycophantic at times. And so it was that among all those with whom he could be said

to be in either intimate or casual contact, Short was about the only one who offered even a chance for an inquiry which might prove productive of some helpful information.

In consequence, in passing Short's place each evening and morning, once he thought of him in this light, he made it a point to nod and smile in a most friendly manner, until at least three days had gone by. And then, feeling that he had paved the way as much as his present predicament would permit, he stopped in, not at all sure that on this first occasion he would be able to broach the dangerous subject. The tale he had fixed upon to tell Short was that he had been approached by a young working-man in the factory, newly-married, who, threatened with an heir and not being able to afford one as yet, had appealed to him for information as to where he might now find a doctor to help him. The only interesting additions which Clyde proposed to make to this were that the young man, being very poor and timid and not so very intelligent, was not able to speak or do much for himself. Also that he, Clyde, being better informed, although so new locally as not to be able to direct him to any physician (an after-thought intended to put the idea into Short's mind that he himself was never helpless and so not likely ever to want such advice for himself), had already advised the young man of a temporary remedy. But unfortunately, so his story was to run, this had already failed to work. Hence something more certain—a physician, no less—was necessary. And Short, having been here longer, and, as he had heard him explain, hailing previously from Gloversville, it was quite certain, as Clyde now argued with himself, that he would know of at least one—or should. But in order to divert suspicion from himself he was going to add that of course he probably could get news of some one in his own set, only, the situation being so unusual (any reference to any such thing in his own world being likely to set his own group talking), he preferred to ask some one like Short, who as a favor would keep it quiet.

As it chanced on this occasion, Short himself, owing to his having done a very fair day's business, was in an exceedingly jovial frame of mind. And Clyde having entered, to buy a pair of socks, perhaps, he began: "Well, it's good to see you again, Mr. Griffiths. How are you? I was just thinking it's about time you stopped in and let me show you some of the things I got in since you were here before. How are things with the Griffiths Company anyhow?"

Short's manner, always brisk, was on this occasion doubly reassuring, since he liked Clyde, only now the latter was so in-

tensely keyed up by the daring of his own project that he could scarcely bring himself to carry the thing off with the air he would have liked to have employed.

Nevertheless, being in the store and so, seemingly, committed to the project, he now began: "Oh, pretty fair. Can't kick a bit. I always have all I can do, you know." At the same time he began nervously fingering some ties hung upon movable nickeled rods. But before he had wasted a moment on these, Mr. Short, turning and spreading some boxes of very special ties from a shelf behind him on the glass case, remarked: "Never mind looking at those, Mr. Griffiths. Look at these. These are what I want to show you and they won't cost *you* any more. Just got 'em in from New York this morning." He picked up several bundles of six each, the very latest, as he explained. "See anything else like this anywhere around here yet? I'll say you haven't." He eyed Clyde smilingly, the while he wished sincerely that such a young man, so well connected, yet not rich like the others, would be friends with him. It would place him here.

Clyde, fingering the offerings and guessing that what Short was saying was true, was now so troubled and confused in his own mind that he could scarcely think and speak as planned. "Very nice, sure," he said, turning them over, feeling that at another time he would have been pleased to possess at least two. "I think maybe I'll take this one, anyhow, and this one, too." He drew out two and held them up, while he was thinking how to broach the so much more important matter that had brought him here. For why should he be troubling to buy ties, dilly-dallying in this way, when all he wanted to ask Short about was this other matter? Yet how hard it was now—how very hard. And yet he really must, although perhaps not so abruptly. He would look around a little more at first in order to allay suspicion—ask about some socks. Only why should he be doing that, since he did not need anything, Sondra only recently having presented him with a dozen handkerchiefs, some collars, ties and socks. Nevertheless every time he decided to speak he felt a sort of sinking sensation at the pit of his stomach, a fear that he could not or would not carry the thing off with the necessary ease and conviction. It was all so questionable and treacherous—so likely to lead to exposure and disgrace in some way. He would probably not be able to bring himself to speak to Short to-night. And yet, as he argued with himself, how could the occasion ever be more satisfactory?

Short, in the meantime having gone to the rear of the store

and now returning, with a most engaging and even sycophantic smile on his face, began with: "Saw you last Tuesday evening about nine o'clock going into the Finchleys' place, didn't I? Beautiful house and grounds they have there."

Clyde saw that Short really was impressed by his social station here. There was a wealth of admiration mingled with a touch of servility. And at once, because of this, he took heart, since he realized that with such an attitude dominating the other, whatever he might say would be colored in part at least by his admirer's awe and respect. And after examining the socks and deciding that one pair at least would soften the difficulty of his demand, he added: "Oh, by the way, before I forget it. There's something I've been wanting to ask you about. Maybe you can tell me what I want to know. One of the boys at the factory—a young fellow who hasn't been married very long—about four months now, I guess—is in a little trouble on account of his wife." He paused, because of his uncertainty as to whether he could succeed with this now or not, seeing that Short's expression changed ever so slightly. And yet, having gone so far, he did not know how to recede. So now he laughed nervously and then added: "I don't know why they always come to me with their troubles, but I guess they think I ought to know all about these things." (He laughed again.) "Only I'm about as new and green here as anybody and so I'm kinda stumped. But you've been here longer than I have, I guess, and so I thought I might ask you."

His manner as he said this was as nonchalant as he could make it, the while he decided now that this was a mistake—that Short would most certainly think him a fool or queer. Yet Short, taken back by the nature of the query, which he sensed as odd coming from Clyde to him (he had noted Clyde's sudden restraint and slight nervousness), was still so pleased to think that even in connection with so ticklish a thing as this, he should be made the recipient of his confidence, that he instantly recovered his former poise and affability, and replied: "Why, sure, if it's anything I can help you with, Mr. Griffiths, I'll be only too glad to. Go ahead, what is it?"

"Well, it's this way," began Clyde, not a little revived by the other's hearty response, yet lowering his voice in order to give the dreadful subject its proper medium of obscurity, as it were. "His wife's already two months gone and he can't afford a kid yet and he doesn't know how to get rid of it. I told him last month when he first came to me to try a certain medicine that usually works"—this to impress Short with his own personal

wisdom and resourcefulness in such situations and hence by implication to clear his own skirts, as it were—"But I guess he didn't handle it right. Anyhow he's all worked up about it now and wants to see some doctor who could do something for her, you see. Only I don't know anybody here myself. Haven't been here long enough. If it were Kansas City or Chicago now," he interpolated securely, "I'd know what to do. I know three or four doctors out there." (To impress Short he attempted a wise smile.) "But down here it's different. And if I started asking around in my crowd and it ever got back to my relatives, they wouldn't understand. But I thought if you knew of any one you wouldn't mind telling me. I wouldn't really bother myself, only I'm sorry for this fellow."

He paused, his face, largely because of the helpful and interested expression on Short's, expressing more confidence than when he had begun. And although Short was still surprised he was more than pleased to be as helpful as he could.

"You say it's been two months now."

"Yes."

"And the stuff you suggested didn't work, eh?"

"No."

"She's tried it again this month, has she?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is bad, sure enough. I guess she's in bad all right. The trouble with this place is that I haven't been here so very long either, Mr. Griffiths. I only bought this place about a year and a half ago. Now, if I were over in Gloversville—" He paused for a moment, as though, like Clyde, he too were dubious of the wisdom of entering upon details of this kind, but after a few seconds continued: "You see a thing like that's not so easy, wherever you are. Doctors are always afraid of getting in trouble. I did hear once of a case over there, though, where a girl went to a doctor—a fellow who lived a couple miles out. But she was of pretty good family too, and the fellow who took her to him was pretty well-known about there. So I don't know whether this doctor would do anything for a stranger, although he might at that. But I know that sort of thing is going on all the time, so you might try. If you wanta send this fellow to him, tell him not to mention me or let on who sent him, 'cause I'm pretty well-known around there and I wouldn't want to be mixed up in it in case anything went wrong, you see. You know how it is."

And Clyde, in turn, replied gratefully: "Oh, sure, he'll understand all right. I'll tell him not to mention any names." And

getting the doctor's name, he extracted a pencil and notebook from his pocket in order to be sure that the important information should not escape him.

Short, sensing his relief, was inclined to wonder whether there was a working-man, or whether it was not Clyde himself who was in this scrape. Why should he be speaking for a young working-man at the factory? Just the same, he was glad to be of service, though at the same time he was thinking what a bit of local news this would be, assuming that any time in the future he should choose to retail it. Also that Clyde, unless he was truly playing about with some girl here who was in trouble, was foolish to be helping anybody else in this way—particularly a working-man. You bet he wouldn't.

Nevertheless he repeated the name, with the initials, and the exact neighborhood, as near as he could remember, giving the car stop and a description of the house. Clyde, having obtained what he desired, now thanked him, and then went out while the haberdasher looked after him genially and a little suspiciously. These rich young bloods, he thought. That's a funny request for a fellow like that to make of me. You'd think with all the people he knows and runs with here he'd know some one who would tip him off quicker than I could. Still, maybe, it's just because of them that he is afraid to ask around here. You don't know who he might have got in trouble—that young Finchley girl herself, even. You never can tell. I see him around with her occasionally, and she's gay enough. But, gee, wouldn't that be the . . .

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE information thus gained was a relief, but only partially so. For both Clyde and Roberta there was no real relief now until this problem should be definitely solved. And although within a few moments after he had obtained it, he appeared and explained that at last he had secured the name of some one who might help her, still there was yet the serious business of heartening her for the task of seeing the doctor alone, also for the story that was to exculpate him and at the same time win for her sufficient sympathy to cause the doctor to make the charge for his service merely nominal.

But now, instead of protesting as at first he feared that she might, Roberta was moved to acquiesce. So many things in Clyde's attitude since Christmas had so shocked her that she was bewildered and without a plan other than to extricate herself as best she might without any scandal attaching to her or him and then going her own way—pathetic and abrasive though it might be. For since he did not appear to care for her any more and plainly desired to be rid of her, she was in no mood to compel him to do other than he wished. Let him go. She could make her own way. She had, and she could too, without him, if only she could get out of this. Yet, as she said this to herself, however, and a sense of the full significance of it all came to her, the happy days that would never be again, she put her hands to her eyes and brushed away uncontrollable tears. To think that all that was should come to this.

Yet when he called the same evening after visiting Short, his manner redolent of a fairly worth-while achievement, she merely said, after listening to his explanation in as receptive a manner as she could: "Do you know just where this is, Clyde? Can we get there on the car without much trouble, or will we have to walk a long way?" And after he had explained that it was but a little way out of Gloversville, in the suburbs really, an interurban stop being but a quarter of a mile from the house, she had added: "Is he home at night, or will we have to go in the daytime? It would be so much better if we could go at night. There'd be so much less danger of any one seeing us."

And being assured that he was, as Clyde had learned from Short, she went on: "But do you know is he old or young? I'd feel so much easier and safer if he were old. I don't like young doctors. We've always had an old doctor up home and I feel so much easier talking to some one like him."

Clyde did not know. He had not thought to inquire, but to reassure her he ventured that he was middle-aged—which chanced to be the fact.

The following evening the two of them departed, but separately as usual, for Fonda, where it was necessary to change cars. And once within the approximate precincts of the physician's residence, they stepped down and made their way along a road, which in this mid-state winter weather was still covered with old and dry-packed snow. It offered a comparatively smooth floor for their quick steps. For in these days there was no longer that lingering intimacy which formerly would have characterized both. In those other and so recent days, as Roberta was constantly thinking, he would have been only too glad in such a place as this, if not on such an occasion, to drag his steps, put an arm about her waist, and talk about nothing at all—the night, the work at the factory, Mr. Liggett, his uncle, the current movies, some place they were planning to go, something they would love to do together if they could. But now . . . And on this particular occasion, when most of all, and if ever, she needed the full strength of his devotion and support! Yet now, as she could see, he was most nervously concerned as to whether, going alone in this way, she was going to get scared and "back out"; whether she was going to think to say the right thing at the right time and convince the doctor that he must do something for her, and for a nominal fee.

"Well, Bert, how about you? All right? You're not going to get cold feet now, are you? Gee, I hope not because this is going to be a good chance to get this thing done and over with. And it isn't like you were going to some one who hadn't done anything like this before, you know, because this fellow has. I got that straight. All you have to do now, is to say, well, you know, that you're in trouble, see, and that you don't know how you're going to get out of it unless he'll help you in some way, because you haven't any friends here you can go to. And besides, as things are, you couldn't go to 'em if you wanted to. They'd tell on you, see. Then if he asks where I am or who I am, you just say that I was a fellow here—but that I've gone—give any name you want to, but that I've gone, and you don't know where I've gone to—run away, see. Then you'd better

say, too, that you wouldn't have come to him only that you heard of another case in which he helped some one else—that a girl told you, see. Only you don't want to let on that you're paid much, I mean,—because if you do he may want to make the bill more than I can pay, see, unless he'll give us a few months in which to do it, or something like that, you see."

Clyde was so nervous and so full of the necessity of charging Roberta with sufficient energy and courage to go through with this and succeed, now that he had brought her this far along with it, that he scarcely realized how inadequate and trivial, even, in so far as her predicament and the doctor's mood and temperament were concerned, his various instructions and bits of inexperienced advice were. And she on her part was not only thinking how easy it was for him to stand back and make suggestions, while she was confronted with the necessity of going forward, and that alone, but also that he was really thinking more of himself than he was of her—some way to make her get herself out of it inexpensively and without any real trouble to him.

At the same time, even here and now, in spite of all this, she was still decidedly drawn to him—his white face, his thin hands, nervous manner. And although she knew he talked to encourage her to do what he had not the courage or skill to do himself, she was not angry. Rather, she was merely saying to herself in this crisis that although he advised so freely she was not going to pay attention to him—much. What she was going to say was not that she was deserted, for that seemed too much of a disagreeable and self-incriminating remark for her to make concerning herself, but rather that she was married and that she and her young husband were too poor to have a baby as yet—the same story Clyde had told the druggist in Schenectady, as she recalled. For after all, what did he know about how she felt? And he was not going with her to make it easier for her.

Yet dominated by the purely feminine instinct to cling to some one for support, she now turned to Clyde, taking hold of his hands and standing quite still, wishing that he would hold and pet her and tell her that it was all right and that she must not be afraid. And although he no longer cared for her, now in the face of this involuntary evidence of her former trust in him, he released both hands and putting his arms about her, the more to encourage her than anything else, observed: "Come on now, Bert. Gee, you can't act like this, you know. You don't want to lose your nerve now that we're here, do you? It won't be so hard once you get there. I know it won't. All

you got to do is to go up and ring the bell, see, and when he comes, or whoever comes, just say you want to see the doctor alone, see. Then he'll understand it's something private and it'll be easier."

He went on with more advice of the same kind, and she, realizing from his lack of spontaneous enthusiasm for her at this moment how desperate was her state, drew herself together as vigorously as she could, and saying: "Well, wait here, then, will you? Don't go very far away, will you? I may be right back," hurried along in the shadow through the gate and up a walk which led to the front door.

In answer to her ring the door was opened by one of those exteriorly as well as mentally sober, small-town practitioners who, Clyde's and Short's notion to the contrary notwithstanding, was the typical and fairly conservative physician of the countryside —solemn, cautious, moral, semi-religious to a degree, holding some views which he considered liberal and others which a fairly liberal person would have considered narrow and stubborn into the bargain. Yet because of the ignorance and stupidity of so many of those about him, he was able to consider himself at least fairly learned. In constant touch with all phases of ignorance and dereliction as well as sobriety, energy, conservatism, success and the like, he was more inclined, where fact appeared to nullify his early conclusions in regard to many things, to suspend judgment between the alleged claims of heaven and hell and leave it there suspended and undisturbed. Physically he was short, stocky, bullet-headed and yet interestingly-featured, with quick gray eyes and a pleasant mouth and smile. His short iron-gray hair was worn "bangs" fashion, a bit of rural vanity. And his arms and hands, the latter fat and pudgy, yet sensitive, hung limply at his sides. He was fifty-eight, married, the father of three children, one of them a son already studying medicine in order to succeed to his father's practice.

After showing Roberta into a littered and commonplace waiting room and asking her to remain until he had finished his dinner, he presently appeared in the door of an equally commonplace inner room, or office, where were his desk, two chairs, some medical instruments, books and apparently an ante-chamber containing other medical things, and motioned her to a chair. And because of his grayness, solidity, stolidity, as well as an odd habit he had of blinking his eyes, Roberta was not a little overawed, though by no means so unfavorably impressed as she had feared she might be. At least he was old and he seemed intelligent and conservative, if not exactly sympathetic or warm in

his manner. And after looking at her curiously a moment, as though seeking to recognize some one of the immediate vicinity, he began: "Well, now who is this, please? And what can I do for you?" His voice was low and quite reassuring—a fact for which Roberta was deeply grateful.

At the same time, startled by the fact that at last she had reached the place and the moment when, if ever, she must say the degrading truth about herself, she merely sat there, her eyes first upon him, then upon the floor, her fingers beginning to toy with the handle of the small bag she carried.

"You see, well," she began, earnestly and nervously, her whole manner suddenly betraying the terrific strain under which she was laboring. "I came . . . I came . . . that is . . . I don't know whether I can tell you about myself or not. I thought I could just before I came in, but now that I am here and I see you . . ." She paused and moved back in her chair as though to rise, at the same time that she added: "Oh, dear, how very dreadful it all is. I'm so nervous and . . ."

"Well, now, my dear," he resumed, pleasantly and reassuringly, impressed by her attractive and yet sober appearance and wondering for the moment what could have upset so clean, modest and sedate-looking a girl, and hence not a little amused by her "now that I see you,"—"Just what is there about me 'now that you see me,' " he repeated after her, "that so frightens you? I am only a country doctor, you know, and I hope I'm not as dreadful as you seem to think. You can be sure that you can tell me anything you wish—anything at all about yourself—and you needn't be afraid. If there's anything I can do for you, I'll do it."

He was decidedly pleasant, as she now thought, and yet so sober and reserved and probably conventional withal that what she was holding in mind to tell him would probably shock him not a little—and then what? Would he do anything for her? And if he would, how was she to arrange about money, for that certainly would be a point in connection with all this? If only Clyde or some one were here to speak for her. And yet she must speak now that she was here. She could not leave without. Once more she moved and twisted, seizing nervously on a large button of her coat to turn between her thumb and forefinger, and then went on chokingly.

"But this is . . . this is . . . well, something different, you know, maybe not what you think. . . . I . . . I . . . well . . ."

Again she paused, unable to proceed, shading from white to

red and back as she spoke. And because of the troubled modesty of her approach, as well as a certain clarity of eye, whiteness of forehead, sobriety of manner and dress, the doctor could scarcely bring himself to think for a moment that this was anything other than one of those morbid exhibitions of innocence, or rather inexperience, in connection with everything relating to the human body—so characteristic of the young and unsophisticated in some instances. And so he was about to repeat his customary formula in such cases that all could be told to him without fear or hesitation, whatever it might be, when a secondary thought, based on Roberta's charm and vigor, as well as her own thought waves attacking his cerebral receptive centers, caused him to decide that he might be wrong. After all, why might not this be another of those troublesome youthful cases in which possibly immorality and illegitimacy was involved. She was so young, healthy and attractive, besides, they were always cropping up, these cases,—in connection with the most respectable-looking girls at times. And invariably they spelled trouble and distress for doctors. And, for various reasons connected with his own temperament, which was retiring and recessive, as well as the nature of this local social world, he disliked and hesitated to even trifle with them. They were illegal, dangerous, involved little or no pay as a rule, and the sentiment of this local world was all against them as he knew. Besides he personally was more or less irritated by these young scamps of boys and girls who were so free to exercise the normal functions of their natures in the first instance, but so ready to refuse the social obligations which went with them—marriage afterwards. And so, although in several cases in the past ten years where family and other neighborhood and religious considerations had made it seem quite advisable, he had assisted in extricating from the consequences of their folly several young girls of good family who had fallen from grace and could not otherwise be rescued, still he was opposed to aiding, either by his own countenance or skill, any lapses or tangles not heavily sponsored by others. It was too dangerous. Ordinarily it was his custom to advise immediate and unconditional marriage. Or, where that was not possible, the perpetrator of the infamy having decamped, it was his general and self-consciously sanctioned practice to have nothing at all to do with the matter. It was too dangerous and ethically and socially wrong and criminal into the bargain.

In consequence he now looked at Roberta in an extremely sober manner. By no means, he now said to himself, must he allow

himself to become emotionally or otherwise involved here. And so in order to help himself as well as her to attain and maintain a balance which would permit of both extricating themselves without too much trouble, he drew toward him his black leather case record book and, opening it, said: "Now, let's see if we can't find out what the trouble is here. What is your name?"

"Ruth Howard. Mrs. Howard," replied Roberta nervously and tensely, at once fixing upon a name which Clyde had suggested for her use. And now, interestingly enough, at mention of the fact that she was married, he breathed easier. But why the tears then? What reason could a young married woman have for being so intensely shy and nervous?

"And your husband's first name?" he went on.

As simple as the question was, and as easy as it should have been to answer, Roberta nevertheless hesitated before she could bring herself to say: "Gifford," her older brother's name.

"You live around here, I presume?"

"In Fonda."

"Yes. And how old are you?"

"Twenty-two."

"How long have you been married?"

This inquiry being so intimately connected with the problem before her, she again hesitated before saying, "Let me see—three months."

At once Dr. Glenn became dubious again, though he gave her no sign. Her hesitancy arrested him. Why the uncertainty? He was wondering now again whether he was dealing with a truthful girl or whether his first suspicions were being substantiated. In consequence he now asked: "Well, now what seems to be the trouble, Mrs. Howard? You need have no hesitancy in telling me—none whatsoever. I am used to such things year in and out, whatever they are. That is my business, listening to the troubles of people."

"Well," began Roberta, nervously once more, this terrible confession drying her throat and thickening her tongue almost, while once more she turned the same button of her coat and gazed at the floor. "It's like this . . . You see . . . my husband hasn't much money . . . and I have to work to help out with expenses and neither of us make so very much." (She was astonishing herself with her own shameful power to lie in this instance—she, who had always hated to lie.) "So . . . of course . . . we can't afford to . . . to have . . . well, any . . . children, you see, so soon, anyhow, and . . ."

She paused, her breath catching, and really unable to proceed further with this wholesale lying.

The doctor realizing from this, as he thought, what the true problem was—that she was a newly-married girl who was probably faced by just such a problem as she was attempting to outline—yet not wishing to enter upon any form of malpractice and at the same time not wishing to appear too discouraging to a young couple just starting out in life, gazed at her somewhat more sympathetically, the decidedly unfortunate predicament of these young people, as well as her appropriate modesty in the face of such a conventionally delicate situation, appealing to him. It was too bad. Young people these days did have a rather hard time of it, getting started in some cases, anyhow. And they were no doubt faced by some pressing financial situations. Nearly all young people were. Nevertheless, this business of a contraceptal operation or interference with the normal or God-arranged life processes, well, that was a ticklish and unnatural business at best which he wanted as little as possible to do with. Besides, young, healthy people, even though poor, when they undertook marriage, knew what they were about. And it was not impossible for them to work, the husband anyhow, and hence manage in some way.

And now straightening himself around in his chair very soberly and authoritatively, he began: "I think I understand what you want to say to me, Mrs. Howard. But I'm also wondering if you have considered what a very serious and dangerous thing it is you have in mind. But," he added, suddenly, another thought as to whether his own reputation in this community was in any way being tarnished by rumor of anything he had done in the past coming to him, "just how did you happen to come to me, anyhow?"

Something about the tone of his voice, the manner in which he asked the question—the caution of it as well as the possibly impending resentment in case it should turn out that any one suspected him of a practice of this sort—caused Roberta to hesitate and to feel that any statement to the effect that she had heard of or been sent by any one else—Clyde to the contrary notwithstanding—might be dangerous. Perhaps she had better not say that she had been sent by any one. He might resent it as an insult to his character as a reputable physician. A budding instinct for diplomacy helped her in this instance, and she replied: "I've noticed your sign in passing several times and I've heard different people say you were a good doctor."

His uncertainty allayed, he now continued: "In the first

place, the thing you want done is something my conscience would not permit me to advise. I understand, of course, that you consider it necessary. You and your husband are both young and you probably haven't very much money to go on, and you both feel that an interruption of this kind will be a great strain in every way. And no doubt it will be. Still, as I see it, marriage is a very sacred thing, and children are a blessing—not a curse. And when you went to the altar three months ago you were probably not unaware that you might have to face just such a situation as this. All young married people are, I think." ("The altar," thought Roberta sadly. If only it were so.) "Now I know that the tendency of the day in some quarters is very much in this direction, I am sorry to say. There are those who feel it quite all right if they can shirk the normal responsibilities in such cases as to perform these operations, but it's very dangerous, Mrs. Howard, very dangerous legally and ethically as well as medically very wrong. Many women who seek to escape childbirth die in this way. Besides it is a prison offense for any doctor to assist them, whether there are bad consequences or not. You know that, I suppose. At any rate, I, for one, am heartily opposed to this sort of thing from every point of view. The only excuse I have ever been able to see for it is when the life of the mother, for instance, depends upon such an operation. Not otherwise. And in such cases the medical profession is in accord. But in this instance I'm sure the situation isn't one which warrants anything like that. You seem to me to be a strong, healthy girl. Motherhood should hold no serious consequences for you. And as for money reasons, don't you really think now that if you just go ahead and have this baby, you and your husband would find means of getting along? You say your husband is an electrician?"

"Yes," replied Roberta, nervously, not a little overawed and subdued by his solemn moralizing.

"Well, now, there you are," he went on. "That's not such an unprofitable profession. At least all electricians charge enough. And when you consider, as you must, how serious a thing you are thinking of doing, that you are actually planning to destroy a young life that has as good a right to its existence as you have to yours . . ." he paused in order to let the substance of what he was saying sink in—"well, then, I think you might feel called upon to stop and consider—both you and your husband. Besides," he added, in a diplomatic and more fatherly and even intriguing tone of voice, "I think that once you have it it will more than make up to you both for whatever little hard-

ship it's coming will bring you. Tell me," he added curiously at this point, "does your husband know of this? Or is this just some plan of yours to save him and yourself from too much hardship?" He almost beamed cheerfully as, fancying he had captured Roberta in some purely nervous and feminine economy as well as dread, he decided that if so he could easily extract her from her present mood. And she, sensing his present drift and feeling that one lie more or less could neither help nor harm her, replied quickly: "He knows."

"Well, then," he went on, slightly reduced by the fact that his surmise was incorrect, but none the less resolved to dissuade her and him, too: "I think you two should really consider very seriously before you go any further in this matter. I know when young people first face a situation like this they always look on the darkest side of it, but it doesn't always work out that way. I know my wife and I did with our first child. But we got along. And if you will only stop now and talk it over, you'll see it in a different light, I'm sure. And then you won't have your conscience to deal with afterwards, either." He ceased, feeling reasonably sure that he had dispelled the fear, as well as the determination that had brought Roberta to him—that, being a sensible, ordinary wife, she would now desist of course—think nothing more of her plan and leave.

But instead of either acquiescing cheerfully or rising to go, as he thought she might, she gave him a wide-eyed terrified look and then as instantly burst into tears. For the total effect of his address had been to first revive more clearly than ever the normal social or conventional aspect of the situation which all along she was attempting to shut out from her thoughts and which, under ordinary circumstances, assuming that she was really married, was exactly the attitude she would have taken. But now the realization that her problem was not to be solved at all, by this man at least, caused her to be seized with what might best be described as morbid panic.

Suddenly beginning to open and shut her fingers and at the same time beating her knees, while her face contorted itself with pain and terror, she exclaimed: "But you don't understand, doctor, you don't understand! I *have* to get out of this in some way! I have to. It isn't like I told you at all. I'm not married. I haven't any husband at all. But, oh, you don't know what this means to me. My family! My father! My mother! I can't tell you. But I must get out of it. I must! I must! Oh, you don't know, you don't know! I must! I must!" She

began to rock backward and forward, at the same time swaying from side to side as in a trance.

And Glenn, surprised and startled by this sudden demonstration as well as emotionally affected, and yet at the same time advised thereby that his original surmise had been correct, and hence that Roberta had been lying, as well as that if he wished to keep himself out of this he must now assume a firm and even heartless attitude, asked solemnly: "You are not married, you say?"

For answer now Roberta merely shook her head negatively and continued to cry. And at last gathering the full import of her situation, Dr. Glenn got up, his face a study of troubled and yet conservative caution and sympathy. But without saying anything at first he merely looked at her as she wept. Later he added: "Well, well, this is too bad. I'm sorry." But fearing to commit himself in any way, he merely paused, adding after a time soothingly and dubiously: "You mustn't cry. That won't help you any." He then paused again, still determined not to have anything to do with this case. Yet a bit curious as to the true nature of the story he finally asked: "Well, then where is the young man who is the cause of your trouble? Is he here?"

Still too overcome by shame and despair to speak, Roberta merely shook her head negatively.

"But he knows that you're in trouble, doesn't he?"

"Yes," replied Roberta faintly.

"And he won't marry you?"

"He's gone away."

"Oh, I see. The young scamp! And don't you know where he's gone?"

"No," lied Roberta, weakly.

"How long has it been since he left you?"

"About a week now." Once more she lied.

"And you don't know where he is?"

"No."

"How long has it been since you were sick?"

"Over two weeks now," sobbed Roberta.

"And before that you have always been regular?"

"Yes."

"Well, in the first place," his tone was more comfortable and pleasant than before—he seemed to be snatching at a plausible excuse for extricating himself from a case which promised little other than danger and difficulty, "this may not be as serious as

you think. I know you're probably very much frightened, but it's not unusual for women to miss a period. At any rate, without an examination it wouldn't be possible to be sure, and even if you were, the most advisable thing would be to wait another two weeks. You may find then that there is nothing wrong. I wouldn't be surprised if you did. You seem to be oversensitive and nervous and that sometimes brings about delays of this kind—mere nervousness. At any rate, if you'll take my advice, whatever you do, you'll not do anything now but just go home and wait until you're really sure. For even if anything were to be done, it wouldn't be advisable for you to do anything before then."

"But I've already taken some pills and they haven't helped me," pleaded Roberta.

"What were they?" asked Glenn interestedly, and, after he had learned, merely commented: "Oh, those. Well, they wouldn't be likely to be of any real service to you, if you were pregnant. But I still suggest that you wait, and if you find you pass your second period, then it will be time enough to act, although I earnestly advise you, even then, to do nothing if you can help it, because I consider it wrong to interfere with nature in this way. It would be much better, if you would arrange to have the child and take care of it. Then you wouldn't have the additional sin of destroying a life upon your conscience."

He was very grave and felt very righteous as he said this. But Roberta, faced by terrors which he did not appear to be able to grasp, merely exclaimed, and as dramatically as before: "But I can't do that, doctor, I tell you! I can't. I can't! You don't understand. Oh, I don't know what I shall do unless I find some way out of this. I don't! I don't! I don't!"

She shook her head and clenched her fingers and rocked to and fro while Glenn, impressed by her own terrors, the pity of the folly which, as he saw it, had led her to this dreadful pass, yet professionally alienated by a type of case that spelled nothing but difficulty for him stood determinedly before her and added: "As I told you before, Miss—" (he paused) "Howard, if that is your name, I am seriously opposed to operations of this kind, just as I am to the folly that brings girls and young men to the point where they seem to think they are necessary. A physician may not interfere in a case of this kind unless he is willing to spend ten years in prison, and I think that law is fair enough. Not that I don't realize how painful your present situation appears to you. But there are always those who are willing to

help a girl in your state, providing she doesn't wish to do something which is morally and legally wrong. And so the very best advice I can give you now is that you do nothing at all now or at any time. Better go home and see your parents and confess. It will be much better—much better, I assure you. Not nearly as hard as you think or as wicked as this other way. Don't forget there is a life there—a human—if it is really as you think. A human life which you are seeking to end and that I cannot help you to do. I really cannot. There may be doctors—I know there are—men here and there who take their professional ethics a little less seriously than I do; but I cannot let myself become one of them. I am sorry—very.

"So now the best I can say is—go home to your parents and tell them. It may look hard now but you are going to feel better about it in the long run. If it will make you or them feel any better about it, let them come and talk to me. I will try and make them see that this is not the worst thing in the world, either. But as for doing what you want—I am very, very sorry, but I cannot. My conscience will not permit me."

He paused and gazed at her sympathetically, yet with a determined and concluded look in his eye. And Roberta, dumbfounded by this sudden termination of all her hopes in connection with him and realizing at last that not only had she been misled by Clyde's information in regard to this doctor, but that her technical as well as emotional plea had failed, now walked unsteadily to the door, the terrors of the future crowding thick upon her. And once outside in the dark, after the doctor had most courteously and ruefully closed the door behind her, she paused to lean against a tree that was there—her nervous and physical strength all but failing her. He had refused to help her. He had refused to help her. And now what?

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE first effect of the doctor's decision was to shock and terrify them both—Roberta and Clyde—beyond measure. For apparently now here was illegitimacy and disgrace for Roberta. Exposure and destruction for Clyde. And this had been their one solution seemingly. Then, by degrees, for Clyde at least, there was a slight lifting of the heavy pall. Perhaps, after all, as the doctor had suggested—and once she had recovered her senses sufficiently to talk, she had told him—the end had not been reached. There was the bare possibility, as suggested by the druggist, Short and the doctor, that she might be mistaken. And this, while not producing a happy reaction in her, had the unsatisfactory result of inducing in Clyde a lethargy based more than anything else on the ever-haunting fear of inability to cope with this situation as well as the certainty of social exposure in case he did not which caused him, instead of struggling all the more desperately, to defer further immediate action. For, such was his nature that, although he realized clearly the probable tragic consequences if he did not act, still it was so hard to think to whom else to apply to without danger to himself. To think that the doctor had "turned her down," as he phrased it, and that Short's advice should have been worth as little as that!

But apart from nervous thoughts as to whom to turn to next, no particular individual occurred to him before the two weeks were gone, or after. It was so hard to just ask anywhere. One just couldn't do it. Besides, of whom could he ask now? Of whom? These things took time, didn't they? Yet in the meantime, the days going by, both he and Roberta had ample time to consider what, if any, steps they must take—the one in regard to the other—in case no medical or surgical solution was found. For Roberta, while urging and urging, if not so much by words as by expression and mood at her work, was determined that she must not be left to fight this out alone—she could not be. On the other hand, as she could see, Clyde did nothing. For apart from what he had already attempted to do, he was absolutely at a loss how to proceed. He had no intimates

and in consequence he could only think of presenting the problem as an imaginary one to one individual and another here or there in the hope of extracting some helpful information. At the same time, and as impractical and evasive as it may seem, there was the call of that diverting world of which Sondra was a part, evenings and Sundays, when, in spite of Roberta's wretched state and mood, he was called to go here and there, and did, because in so doing he was actually relieving his own mind of the dread specter of disaster that was almost constantly before it. If only he could get her out of this! If only he could. But how, without money, intimates, a more familiar understanding of the medical or if not that exactly, then the sub rosa world of sexual free-masonry which some at times—the bell-hops of the Green-Davidson, for instance, seemed to understand. He had written to Ratterer, of course, but there had been no answer, since Ratterer had removed to Florida and as yet Clyde's letter had not reached him. And locally all those he knew best were either connected with the factory or society—individuals on the one hand too inexperienced or dangerous, or on the other hand, too remote and dangerous, since he was not sufficiently intimate with any of them as yet to command their true confidence and secrecy.

At the same time he must do something—he could not just rest and drift. Assuredly Roberta could not long permit him to do that—faced as she was by exposure. And so from time to time he actually racked himself—seized upon straws and what would have been looked upon by most as forlorn chances. Thus, for instance, an associate foreman, chancing to reminisce one day concerning a certain girl in his department who had "gotten in trouble" and had been compelled to leave, he had been given the opportunity to inquire what he thought such a girl did in case she could not afford or did not want to have a child. But this particular foreman, being as uninformed as himself, merely observed that she probably had to see a doctor if she knew one or "go through with it"—which left Clyde exactly where he was. On another occasion, in connection with a conversation in a barber shop relating to a local case reported in *The Star* where a girl was suing a local ne'er-do-well for breach of promise, the remark was made that she would "never have sued that guy, you bet, unless she had to." Whereupon Clyde seized the opportunity to remark hopefully, "But wouldn't you think that she could find some way of getting out of trouble without marrying a fellow she didn't like?"

"Well, that's not so easy as you may think, particularly

around here," elucidated the wiseacre who was trimming his hair. "In the first place it's agin' the law. And next it takes a lotta money. An' in case you ain't got it, well, money makes the mare go, you know." He snip-snipped with his scissors while Clyde, confronted by his own problem, meditated on how true it was. If he had a lot of money—even a few hundred dollars—he might take it now and possibly persuade her—who could tell—to go somewhere by herself and have an operation performed.

Yet each day, as on the one before, he was saying to himself that he must find some one. And Roberta was saying to herself that she too must act—must not really depend on Clyde any longer if he were going to act so. One could not trifle or compromise with a terror of this kind. It was a cruel imposition on her. It must be that Clyde did not realize how terribly this affected her and even him. For certainly, if he were not going to help her out of it, as he had distinctly said he would do at first, then decidedly she could not be expected to weather the subsequent storm alone. Never, never, never! For, after all, as Roberta saw it, Clyde was a man—he had a good position—it was not he, but she, who was in this treacherous position and unable to extricate herself alone.

And beginning with the second day after the second period, when she discovered for once and all that her worst suspicions were true, she not only emphasized the fact in every way that she could that she was distressed beyond all words, but on the third day announced to him in a note that she was again going to see the doctor near Gloversville that evening, regardless of his previous refusal—so great was her need—and also asking Clyde whether he would accompany her—a request which, since he had not succeeded in doing anything, and although he had an engagement with Sondra, he instantly acceded to—feeling it to be of greater importance than anything else. He must excuse himself to Sondra on the ground of work.

And accordingly this second trip was made, a long and nervous conversation between himself and Roberta on the way resulting in nothing more than some explanations as to why thus far he had not been able to achieve anything, plus certain encomiums addressed to her concerning her courage in acting for herself in this way.

Yet the doctor again would not and did not act. After waiting nearly an hour for his return from somewhere, she was merely permitted to tell him of her unchanged state and her destroying fears in regard to herself, but with no hint from

him that he could be induced to act as indeed he could act. It was against his prejudices and ethics.

And so once more Roberta returned, this time not crying, actually too sad to cry, choked with the weight of her impending danger and the anticipatory fears and miseries that attended it.

And Clyde, hearing of this defeat, was at last reduced to a nervous, gloomy silence, absolutely devoid of a helpful suggestion. He could not think what to say and was chiefly fearful lest Roberta now make some demand with which socially or economically he could not comply. However, in regard to this she said little on the way home. Instead she sat and stared out of the window—thinking of her defenseless predicament that was becoming more real and terrible to her hourly. By way of excuse she pleaded that she had a headache. She wanted to be alone—only to think more—to try to work out a solution. She must work out some way. That she knew. But what? How? What could she do? How could she possibly escape? She felt like a cornered animal fighting for its life with all odds against it, and she thought of a thousand remote and entirely impossible avenues of escape, only to return to the one and only safe and sound solution that she really felt should be possible—and that was marriage. And why not? Hadn't she given him all, and that against her better judgment? Hadn't he overpersuaded her? Who was he anyway to so cast her aside? For decidedly at times, and especially since this latest crisis had developed, his manner, because of Sondra and the Griffiths and what he felt to be the fatal effect of all this on his dreams here, was sufficient to make plain that love was decidedly dead, and that he was not thinking nearly so much of the meaning of her state to her, as he was of its import to him, the injury that was most certain to accrue to him. And when this did not completely terrify her, as mostly it did, it served to irritate and slowly develop the conclusion that in such a desperate state as this, she was justified in asking more than ordinarily she would have dreamed of asking, marriage itself, since there was no other door. And why not? Wasn't her life as good as his? And hadn't he joined his to hers, voluntarily? Then, why shouldn't he strive to help her now—or, failing that, make this final sacrifice which was the only one by which she could be rescued apparently. For who were all the society people with whom he was concerned anyhow? And why should he ask her in such a crisis to sacrifice herself, her future and good name, just because of his interest in them? They had never done anything very much for him, certainly not as much as had she. And, just because he was wearying now, after per-

suading her to do his bidding—was that any reason why now, in this crisis, he should be permitted to desert her? After all, wouldn't all of these society people in whom he was so much interested feel that whatever his relationship to them, she would be justified in taking the course which she might be compelled to take?

She brooded on this much, more especially on the return from this second attempt to induce Dr. Glenn to help her. In fact, at moments, her face took on a defiant, determined look which was seemingly new to her, but which only developed suddenly under such pressure. Her jaw became a trifle set. She had made a decision. He would have to marry her. She must make him if there were no other way out of this. She must—she must. Think of her home, her mother, Grace Marr, the Newtons, all who knew her in fact—the terror and pain and shame with which this would sear all those in any way identified with her—her father, brothers, sisters. Impossible! Impossible! It must not and could not be! Impossible. It might seem a little severe to her, even now, to have to insist on this, considering all the emphasis Clyde had hitherto laid upon his prospects here. But how, how else was she to do?

Accordingly the next day, and not a little to his surprise, since for so many hours the night before they had been together, Clyde received another note telling him that he must come again that night. She had something to say to him, and there was something in the tone of the note that seemed to indicate or suggest a kind of defiance of a refusal of any kind, hitherto absent in any of her communications to him. And at once the thought that this situation, unless cleared away, was certain to prove disastrous, so weighed upon him that he could not but put the best face possible on it and consent to go and hear what it was that she had to offer in the way of a solution—or—on the other hand, of what she had to complain.

Going to her room at a late hour, he found her in what seemed to him a more composed frame of mind than at any time since this difficulty had appeared, a state which surprised him a little, since he had expected to find her in tears. But now, if anything, she appeared more complacent, her nervous thoughts as to how to bring about a satisfactory conclusion for herself having called into play a native shrewdness which was now seeking to exercise itself.

And so directly before announcing what was in her mind, she began by asking: "You haven't found out about another doctor, have you, Clyde, or thought of anything?"

"No, I haven't, Bert," he replied most dismally and wearisomely, his own mental tether-length having been strained to the breaking point. "I've been trying to, as you know, but it's so darn hard to find any one who isn't afraid to monkey with a case like this. Honest, to tell the truth, Bert, I'm about stumped. I don't know what we are going to do unless you can think of something. You haven't thought or heard of any one else you could go to, have you?" For, during the conversation that had immediately followed her first visit to the doctor, he had hinted to her that by striking up a fairly intimate relationship with one of the foreign family girls, she might by degrees extract some information there which would be of use to both. But Roberta was not of a temperament that permitted of any such facile friendships, and nothing had come of it.

However, his stating that he was "stumped" now gave her the opportunity she was really desiring, to present the proposition which she felt to be unavoidable and not longer to be delayed. Yet being fearful of how Clyde would react, she hesitated as to the form in which she would present it, and, after shaking her head and manifesting a nervousness which was real enough, she finally said: "Well, I'll tell you, Clyde. I've been thinking about it and I don't see any way out of it unless—unless you, well, marry me. It's two months now, you know, and unless we get married right away, everybody'll know, won't they?"

Her manner as she said this was a mixture of outward courage born out of her conviction that she was in the right and an inward uncertainty about Clyde's attitude, which was all the more fused by a sudden look of surprise, resentment, uncertainty and fear that now transformation-wise played over his countenance; a variation and play which, if it indicated anything definite, indicated that she was seeking to inflict an unwarranted injury on him. For since he had been drawing closer and closer to Sondra, his hopes had heightened so intensely that, hearkening to this demand on the part of Roberta now, his brow wrinkled and his manner changed from one of comparatively affable, if nervous, consideration to that of mingled fear, opposition as well as determination to evade drastic consequence. For this would spell complete ruin for him, the loss of Sondra, his job, his social hopes and ambitions in connection with the Griffiths—all—a thought which sickened and at the same time caused him to hesitate about how to proceed. But he would not! he would not! He would not do this! Never! Never!! Never!!!

Yet after a moment he exclaimed equivocally: "Well, gee, that's all right, too, Bert, for you, because that fixes everything without any trouble at all. But what about me? You don't want to forget that that isn't going to be easy for me, the way things are now. You know I haven't any money. All I have is my job. And besides, the family don't know anything about you yet—not a thing. And if it should suddenly come out now that we've been going together all this time, and that this has happened, and that I was going to have to get married right away, well, gee, they'll know I've been fooling 'em and they're sure to get sore. And then what? They might even fire me."

He paused to see what effect this explanation would have, but noting the somewhat dubious expression which of late characterized Roberta's face whenever he began excusing himself, he added hopefully and evasively, seeking by any trick that he could to delay this sudden issue: "Besides, I'm not so sure that I can't find a doctor yet, either. I haven't had much luck so far, but that's not saying that I won't. And there's a little time yet, isn't there? Sure there is. It's all right up to three months anyway." (He had since had a letter from Ratterer who had commented on this fact.) "And I did hear something the other day of a doctor over in Albany who might do it. Anyway, I thought I'd go over and see before I said anything about him."

His manner, when he said this, was so equivocal that Roberta could tell he was merely lying to gain time. There was no doctor in Albany. Besides it was so plain that he resented her suggestion and was only thinking of some way of escaping it. And she knew well enough that at no time had he said directly that he would marry her. And while she might urge, in the last analysis she could not force him to do anything. He might just go away alone, as he had once said in connection with inadvertently losing his job because of her. And how much greater might not his impulse in that direction now be, if this world here in which he was so much interested were taken away from him, and he were to face the necessity of taking her and a child, too. It made her more cautious and caused her to modify her first impulse to speak out definitely and forcefully, however great her necessity might be. And so disturbed was he by the panorama of the bright world of which Sondra was the center and which was now at stake, that he could scarcely think clearly. Should he lose all this for such a world as he and Roberta could provide for themselves—a small home—a baby, such a routine work-a-day life as taking care of her and a baby on such a salary as he could

earn, and from which most likely he would never again be freed! God! A sense of nausea seized him. He could not and would not do this. And yet, as he now saw, all his dreams could be so easily tumbled about his ears by her and because of one false step on his part. It made him cautious and for the first time in his life caused tact and cunning to visualize itself as a profound necessity.

And at the same time, Clyde was sensing inwardly and somewhat shamefacedly all of this profound change in himself.

But Roberta was saying: "Oh, I know, Clyde, but you yourself said just now that you were stumped, didn't you? And every day that goes by just makes it so much the worse for me, if we're not going to be able to get a doctor. You can't get married and have a child born within a few months—you know that. Every one in the world would know. Besides I have myself to consider as well as you, you know. And the baby, too." (At the mere mention of a coming child Clyde winced and recoiled as though he had been slapped. She noted it.) "I just must do one of two things right away, Clyde—get married or get out of this and you don't seem to be able to get me out of it, do you? If you're so afraid of what your uncle might think or do in case we get married," she added nervously and yet suavely, "why couldn't we get married right away and then keep it a secret for a while—as long as we could, or as long as you thought we ought to," she added shrewdly. "Meanwhile I could go home and tell my parents about it—that I am married, but that it must be kept a secret for a while. Then when the time came, when things got so bad that we couldn't stay here any longer without telling, why we could either go away somewhere, if we wanted to—that is, if you didn't want your uncle to know, or we could just announce that we were married some time ago. Lots of young couples do that nowadays. And as for getting along," she went on, noting a sudden dour shadow that passed over Clyde's face like a cloud, "why we could always find something to do—I know I could, anyhow, once the baby is born."

When first she began to speak, Clyde had seated himself on the edge of the bed, listening nervously and dubiously to all she had to offer. However, when she came to that part which related to marriage and going away, he got up—an irresistible impulse to move overcoming him. And when she concluded with the commonplace suggestion of going to work as soon as the baby was born, he looked at her with little less than panic in his eyes. To think of marrying and being in a position

where it would be necessary to do that, when with a little luck and without interference from her, he might marry Sondra.

"Oh, yes, that's all right for you, Bert. That fixes everything up for you, but how about me? Why, gee whiz, I've only got started here now as it is, and if I have to pack up and get out, and I would have to, if ever they found out about this, why I don't know what I'd do. I haven't any business or trade that I could turn my hand to. It might go hard with both of us. Besides my uncle gave me this chance because I begged him to, and if I walked off now he never would do anything for me."

In his excitement he was forgetting that at one time and another in the past he had indicated to Roberta that the state of his own parents was not wholly unprosperous and that if things did not go just to his liking here, he could return west and perhaps find something to do out there. And it was some general recollection of this that now caused her to ask: "Couldn't we go out to Denver or something like that? Wouldn't your father be willing to help you get something for a time, anyhow?"

Her tone was very soft and pleading, an attempt to make Clyde feel that things could not be as bad as he was imagining. But the mere mention of his father in connection with all this —the assumption that he, of all people, might prove an escape from drudgery for them both, was a little too much. It showed how dreadfully incomplete was her understanding of his true position in this world. Worse, she was looking for help from that quarter. And, not finding it, later might possibly reproach him for that—who could tell—for his lies in connection with it. It made so very clear now the necessity for frustrating, if possible, and that at once, any tendency toward this idea of marriage. It could not be—ever.

And yet how was he to oppose this idea with safety, since she felt that she had this claim on him—how say to her openly and coldly that he could not and would not marry her? And unless he did so now she might think it would be fair and legitimate enough for her to compel him to do so. She might even feel privileged to go to his uncle—his cousin (he could see Gilbert's cold eyes) and expose him! And then destruction! Ruin! The end of all his dreams in connection with Sondra and everything else here. But all he could think of saying now was: "But I can't do this, Bert, not now, anyway," a remark which at once caused Roberta to assume that the idea of marriage, as she had interjected it here, was not one which, under the circumstances, he had the courage to oppose—his saying, "not now,

anyway." Yet even as she was thinking this, he went swiftly on with: "Besides I don't want to get married so soon. It means too much to me at this time. In the first place I'm not old enough and I haven't got anything to get married on. And I can't leave here. I couldn't do half as well anywhere else. You don't realize what this chance means to me. My father's all right, but he couldn't do what my uncle could and he wouldn't. You don't know or you wouldn't ask me to do this."

He paused, his face a picture of puzzled fear and opposition. He was not unlike a harried animal, deftly pursued by hunter and hound. But Roberta, imagining that his total defection had been caused by the social side of Lycurgus as opposed to her own low state and not because of the superior lure of any particular girl, now retorted resentfully, although she desired not to appear so: "Oh, yes, I know well enough why you can't leave. It isn't your position here, though, half as much as it is those society people you are always running around with. I know. You don't care for me any more, Clyde, that's it, and you don't want to give these other people up for me. I know that's it and nothing else. But just the same it wasn't so very long ago that you did, although you don't seem to remember it now." Her cheeks burned and her eyes flamed as she said this. She paused a moment while he gazed at her wondering about the outcome of all this. "But you can't leave me to make out any way I can, just the same, because I won't be left this way, Clyde. I can't! I can't! I tell you." She grew tense and staccato, "It means too much to me. I don't know how to do alone and I, besides, have no one to turn to but you and you must help me. I've got to get out of this, that's all, Clyde, I've got to. I'm not going to be left to face my people and everybody without any help or marriage or anything." As she said this, her eyes turned appealingly and yet savagely toward him and she emphasized it all with her hands, which she clinched and unclinched in a dramatic way. "And if you can't help me out in the way you thought," she went on most agonizedly as Clyde could see, "then you've got to help me out in this other, that's all. At least until I can do for myself. I just won't be left. I don't ask you to marry me forever," she now added, the thought that if by presenting this demand in some modified form, she could induce Clyde to marry her, it might be possible afterwards that his feeling toward her would change to a much more kindly one. "You can leave me after a while if you want to. After I'm out of this. I can't prevent you from doing that and I wouldn't want to if I could. But

you can't leave me now. You can't. You can't! Besides," she added, "I didn't want to get myself in this position and I wouldn't have, but for you. But you made me and made me let you come in here. And now you want to leave me to shift for myself, just because you think you won't be able to go in society any more, if they find out about me."

She paused, the strain of this contest proving almost too much for her tired nerves. At the same time she began to sob nervously and yet not violently—a marked effort at self-restraint and recovery marking her every gesture. And after a moment or two in which both stood there, he gazing dumbly and wondering what else he was to say in answer to all this, she struggling and finally managing to recover her poise, she added: "Oh, what is it about me that's so different to what I was a couple of months ago, Clyde? Will you tell me that? I'd like to know. What is it that has caused you to change so? Up to Christmas, almost, you were as nice to me as any human being could be. You were with me nearly all the time you had, and since then I've scarcely had an evening that I didn't beg for. Who is it? What is it? Some other girl, or what, I'd like to know—that Sondra Finchley or Bertine Cranston, or who?"

Her eyes as she said this were a study. For even to this hour, as Clyde could now see to his satisfaction, since he feared the effect on Roberta of definite and absolute knowledge concerning Sondra, she had no specific suspicion, let alone positive knowledge concerning any girl. And coward-wise, in the face of her present predicament and her assumed and threatened claims on him, he was afraid to say what or who the real cause of this change was. Instead he merely replied and almost unmoved by her sorrow, since he no longer really cared for her: "Oh, you're all wrong, Bert. You don't see what the trouble is. It's my future here—if I leave here I certainly will never find such an opportunity. And if I have to marry in this way or leave here it will all go flooey. I want to wait and get some place first before I marry, see—save some money and if I do this I won't have a chance and you won't either," he added feebly, forgetting for the moment that up to this time he had been indicating rather clearly that he did not want to have anything more to do with her in any way.

"Besides," he continued, "if you could only find some one, or if you would go away by yourself somewhere for a while, Bert, and go through with this alone, I could send you the money to do it on, I know. I could have it between now and the time you had to go."

His face, as he said this, and as Roberta clearly saw, mirrored the complete and resourceless collapse of all his recent plans in regard to her. And she, realizing that his indifference to her had reached the point where he could thus dispose of her and their prospective baby in this casual and really heartless manner, was not only angered in part, but at the same time frightened by the meaning of it all.

"Oh, Clyde," she now exclaimed boldly and with more courage and defiance than at any time since she had known him, "how you have changed! And how hard you can be. To want me to go off all by myself and just to save you—so you can stay here and get along and marry some one here when I am out of the way and you don't have to bother about me any more. Well, I won't do it. It's not fair. And I won't, that's all. I won't. And that's all there is to it. You can get some one to get me out of this or you can marry me and come away with me, at least long enough for me to have the baby and place myself right before my people and every one else that knows me. I don't care if you leave me afterwards, because I see now that you really don't care for me any more, and if that's the way you feel, I don't want you any more than you want me. But just the same, you must help me now—you must. But, oh, dear," she began whimpering again, and yet only slightly and bitterly. "To think that all our love for each other should have come to this—that I am asked to go away by myself—all alone—with no one—while you stay here, oh, dear! oh, dear! And with a baby on my hands afterwards. And no husband."

She clinched her hands and shook her head bleakly. Clyde, realizing well enough that his proposition certainly was cold and indifferent but, in the face of his intense desire for Sondra, the best or at least safest that he could devise, now stood there unable for the moment to think of anything more to say.

And although there was some other discussion to the same effect, the conclusion of this very difficult hour was that Clyde had another week or two at best in which to see if he could find a physician or any one who would assist him. After that —well after that the implied, if not openly expressed, threat which lay at the bottom of this was, unless so extricated and speedily, that he would have to marry her, if not permanently, then at least temporarily, but legally just the same, until once again she was able to look after herself—a threat which was as crushing and humiliating to Roberta as it was torturing to him.